

## Pandemic – Prologue

Had it not been so severe and widespread, it would have been called the Pandemic of 2009-2010. The H1N1 flu virus mutated and although vaccinations were developed, they did little to stop the widespread advance of the new, deadly form. It came short of an ELE, but not by much.

People rushed to their doctor's, clinics and hospital emergency rooms. Tamiflu hadn't worked on either form of the swine flu while Relenza worked on both. Relenza was in short supply and difficult to take because you had to inhale it. Some people could afford to isolate for as long as it took, mainly those into preparedness and farmers.

In this case the principal character was the sole child in a farm family and the father was into preparedness after a fashion. Most farmers are into preparedness after a fashion, it depended on things like how far they lived from town. In this case, not only was the father into preparedness, he was eccentric or maybe antisocial.

In an effort to avoid contracting the flu, many families abandoned city living, thus eliminating human contact. Of those that did, many were unprepared or unskilled at living off the land. Wild game all but disappeared, forcing some to seek out farms for more food.

If the farm belonged to our eccentric, they were given a choice, leave or die. Those that didn't like that and refused to leave died. The farmer shooed his wife and son into the house, collected anything useable and buried them deep. Eventually the attacks stopped, for whatever reason.

The mother tried homeschooling their son, Donald, and he was a bit of a whiz at history, pretty fair at arithmetic and apparently did poorly in English and grammar. Not forced to overcome his shortcomings with English and grammar, he appeared to have the persona of a hillbilly.

This is more of a story about life after the pandemic than the actual pandemic. If you were there to witness the pandemic in person, you probably died in the pandemic or in the immediate thereafter.

ATLANTA – In a disturbing new projection, health officials say up to 40 percent of Americans could get swine flu this year and next and several hundred thousand could die without a successful vaccine campaign and other measures.

The estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are roughly twice the number of those who catch flu in a normal season and add greater weight to hurried efforts to get a new vaccine ready for the fall flu season.

Swine flu has already hit the United States harder than any other nation, but it has struck something of a glancing blow that's more surprising than devastating. The virus

has killed about 300 Americans and experts believe it has sickened more than 1 million, comparable to a seasonal flu with the weird ability to keep spreading in the summer.

Health officials say flu cases may explode in the fall, when schools open and become germ factories, and the new estimates dramatize the need to have vaccines and other measures in place.

A world health official said the first vaccines are expected in September and October. The United States expects to begin testing on some volunteers in August, with 160 million doses ready in October.

The CDC came up with the new projections for the virus' spread last month, but it was first disclosed in an interview this week with The Associated Press.

The estimates are based on a flu pandemic from 1957, which killed nearly 70,000 in the United States but was not as severe as the infamous Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-19. The number of deaths and illnesses from the new swine flu virus would drop if the pandemic peters out or if efforts to slow its spread are successful, said CDC spokesman Tom Skinner.

"Hopefully, mitigation efforts will have a big impact on future cases," he said. Besides pushing flu shots, health officials might urge measures such as avoiding crowded places, hand washing, cough covering and timely use of medicines like Tamiflu.

Because so many more people are expected to catch the new flu, the number of deaths over two years could range from 90,000 to several hundred thousand, the CDC calculated. Again, that is if a new vaccine and other efforts fail.

In a normal flu season, about 36,000 people die from flu and its complications, according to the American Medical Association. That too is an estimate, because death certificates don't typically list flu as a cause of death. Instead, they attribute a fatality to pneumonia or other complications.

Influenza is notoriously hard to predict, and some experts have shied away from a forecast. At a CDC swine flu briefing Friday, one official declined to answer repeated questions about her agency's own estimate.

"I don't think that influenza and its behavior in the population lends itself very well to these kinds of models," said the official, Dr. Anne Schuchat, who oversees the CDC's flu vaccination programs.

The World Health Organization says as many as 2 billion people could become infected in the next two years – nearly a third of the world population. The estimates look at potential impacts in a two-year period because past flu pandemics have occurred in waves over more than one year.

Swine flu has been an escalating concern in Britain and some other European nations, where the virus' late arrival has grabbed attention and some officials at times have sounded alarmed.

In an interview Friday, the WHO's flu chief told the AP the global epidemic is still in its early stages.

"Even if we have hundreds of thousands of cases or a few millions of cases ... we're relatively early in the pandemic," Keiji Fukuda said at WHO headquarters in Geneva. The first vaccines are expected in September and October, Fukuda said. Other vaccines won't be ready until well into the flu season when a further dramatic rise in swine flu cases is expected.

First identified in April, swine flu has likely infected more than 1 million Americans, the CDC believes, with many of those suffering mild cases never reported. There have been 302 deaths and nearly 44,000 laboratory-identified cases, according to numbers released Friday morning.

Because the swine flu virus is new, most people haven't developed an immunity to it. So far, most of those who have died from it in the United States have had other health problems, such as asthma.

The virus has caused an unusual number of serious illnesses in teens and young adults; seasonal flu usually is toughest on the elderly and very young children.

The tale was called Pandemic, not because it was about the Pandemic, but because the Pandemic started it all.

## Pandemic – Chapter 1

“Be careful of the dogs and cats. They’re mostly feral and if you run into a pack you could end up being their next meal.”

“I don’t have much ammo, that’s why I’m going out. I need 20 gauge and .22 Long Rifle. What do you need?”

“I need twelve gauge, 7.62×51mm and .45acp. You’re Mom needs more 9mm and 5.56×45mm.”

“How am I going to haul all of that?”

“Take some pack horses. Get Ruff to go with you, he might be able to give you enough warning so you can dismount, tie down your horse and shoot some of those dogs.”

The problem with hunting for ammo was that it was heavy and hard to find. Assuming you didn’t get attacked by a pack of wild dogs, and assuming you could find some, it took a good pack string to haul it home. The saw buck packsaddles were homemade. The load was evenly divided between the two sides of the saw buck. There were two girdles, and a neck collar and a cupper to keep the load in place.

It would have been easier if we hadn’t broken the axle of the buckboard. Dad said it would take some time for the wood to cure before he tried to fashion the new axle. If he didn’t wait, the wood would shrink and the wheels would get sloppy. And, we needed the ammo now. I’m 17 and close to being full grown. I’ve been riding for as long as I can remember.

There weren’t many people left after that swine flu epidemic a few years back. I’m guessing that the only reason we were spared was Dad insisting on total isolation. I was around ten at the time. Schools had shut down, business had shut down and that stuff they called Tamiflu didn’t work. The one that did, Relenza, was in short supply and hard to intake, you had to sniff it into your nose. Gee, it’s been seven years.

Dad had been, probably still is, a survivalist. The flu hadn’t killed of everyone. It had been estimated, according to Dad, it was on the order of 8-10 times worse than the Influenza Epidemic of 1918. He said that information came from the CDC, whoever or whatever that is. I think being out in the country on 160 acres and the isolation had spared us. Anyone who came near the farm was told to leave and they didn’t, they never drew another breath.

Our farm was about ¼ mile from a river and between our land and the river were standing woods. I hunted them and got my share of tree rats. Out in the fields, I sometimes found rabbits. Dad butchered, cut and wrapped the beef and pork. Mom butchered and I usually got stuck helping pluck the chickens. Since we had a large ice house, it was

kept stocked with meat and Mom canned the vegetables and some fruit, mostly applesauce.

In our country, with the best health system in the world, the death rate was higher because people flocked to hospitals, doctors' offices and clinics. Dad said it wasn't worth the risk and isolation was the only way. So, we isolated for a long time. The flu was a virus, H1N1, and only one anti-viral medication did any good. Like I said, Tamiflu didn't Relenza did.

A day before I left, Dad brought me his model 12 Winchester and his PTR-91. He said I could use the Ruger Mark II because a pistol wasn't much use. He took me through use of the rifle and shotgun and I spent a little time practicing; a little time because ammo was very short. I slung the rifle over my back and carried the shotgun across my lap.

So off I went riding my pinto and leading a pack string of four horses with Ruff tagging along. Mom slipped me a note before I left and asked me to see what I could find for her. It was a short list, one item, Always. I knew what they were although it was never discussed. I knew from what Dad said that 1,000 rounds of the 7.62 went a little under 60 pounds. The shotgun ammo came in 250 round cases, again heavy, but not near what a thousand of rifle ammo went. My .22 ammo would fit in my saddlebags.

I had a destination in mind, a small town with a good gun store, but I'd check China-Mart too. It was getting time for me to have my own 12 gauge, rifle and handgun, 9mm or .45. It wasn't far to the town, 15 miles. On the outskirts I started seeing bodies. Not a lot, but they were the first bodies I'd ever seen that weren't in caskets. Man, I wanted to get my business done and get out of there. I had a universal key for the gun store, a pry bar. I used my LED flashlight with the red filter and located the ammo we wanted and more. Three of the pack horses were loaded with ammo and my new firearms.

Couldn't get a PTR-91 and had to settle for a rifle from Springfield Armory in Illinois. The handgun I found was a Kimber Custom TLE II and based on the price tag had to be a good handgun. I got extra magazines for the pistol and rifle and started looking for a good tactical shotgun. I could choose from an 870 or a Mossberg. I couldn't decide, so I took both. Shotgun shells were available in slugs, 00 and #4 buck for the 12 gauge and hunting loads for my 20 gauge.

I got Mom's stuff at China-Mart and took the .22 ammo from both locations. Saw some canning lids and remembered Mom saying we were getting low. Took all they had; both sizes. While she only had one item on her list, I thought back trying to remember anything else she might have mentioned. She'd mentioned coffee for us and smokes for Dad. If I missed something important I could always come back.

We didn't have many cattle, one bull and two cows. That gave us one beef a year to butcher. Hogs were a different matter; we had enough of those to give away. We kept sitting hens and a rooster so we had chicks and eggs.

Early on, we could farm with the tractor and pull behind implements. The tractor stopped working and Dad said he couldn't fix it himself. Started hunting around for mules or draft horses. Found both, settled on draft horses because they could reproduce. An agricultural museum provided horse drawn implements. But, even with 8 Clydesdales, we couldn't farm the 160. Dad cut back to farming half and some of that half was in edible beans.

I didn't really care for beans, make you gas up. After a while I noticed that stopped. Whoa, I'm at the farm, better stop thinking and start doing.

"How'd you do Boy?"

"Three are loaded down with ammo and new guns for me. The fourth has Mom's stuff, a case of smokes for you and coffee Mom mentioned wanting. Found some canning lids and took 'em all."

"What did you get for guns?"

"A Kimber Classic TLE II, a Springfield Armory Super Match but couldn't decide on shotguns so I took two, an 870 and a 590A1. I got extra magazines for everything. All the ammo I could find. That Super Match had a scope mounted. Who made Carl Zeiss Victory Diavari 6-24x72 T?"

"A German company, fancy scope. Did you get the papers for the rifle and scope?"

"Got the shipping box for the rifle and it had a lot of papers in it. Why?"

"Some of the scopes had bullet drop compensators and built in range finders. Which shotgun do you favor?"

"Couldn't make up my mind and figured you could help me choose."

"Did Ruff do ok?"

"Didn't run off or nothing. Never saw any wild dogs."

"Boy, a wild dog is one that's never been made man's friend. A feral dog was a pet that ended up having to shift for himself. Not the same thing."

The family name is Masterson, Dad was Bartholomew or Bart and Mom was Mary. My name is Donald or Don. We live near Sedalia, Missouri in Pettis County. Good thing it wasn't a war, we're straight east of Whiteman AFB. Those flying wings are something else, but haven't seen one for probably seven years.

"Here's your package Mom."

“Thank you Don, they’re important to me. What else did you get?”

“Coffee for us and smokes for Dad. Got my own set of guns, seem to be pretty fancy. Dad is reading the papers that came with the rifle. I got the feeling that there something about the scope that might cause a problem.”

The thing about that flu a few years back was when you got it, you lived or died and a whole lot of people died. Enough, Dad says to cause the infrastructure to fail. I only got into 5<sup>th</sup> grade, infrastructure? I wasn’t stupid, just uneducated. Mom tried some home schooling but all we had were some paperback books and the family Bible (King James).

After dinner Dad explained that the bullet drop compensator was specific to one cartridge, Black Hills 175gr BTHP. All I know is that the ammo I got was FMJ 147gr military surplus.

“Boy, if I read these papers right, we can adjust that compensator to work with the ammo we have. Have to put a sticker over the one on the knob and sight it in with 100 meter increments. Put marks on the sticker at the different ranges.”

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As he had the time, Dad carefully marked the sticker on the BDC adjustment knob for the 147gr surplus we had. We had about 2,500 rounds, less what he used. He started to tell me about the rifle I got and lost me on a turn. If I have it right, only the M21 and M25 were as good as or better. The M21 was the same rifle with a different stock and the M25 was named after a dead guy; scope only, no iron sights. Once I’d gotten the Kimber worn in, it was a humdinger. I gave Mom the 870 and took the 590A1. That was it for my military style firearms.

Do you recall me telling you that anyone who came near the farm and didn’t leave never took another breath? It happened more than once and most of the times they had hunting rifles or junk imports. One party must have been into Single Action Shooting. Dad always put on a mask and rubber gloves to handle the bodies and their guns were stored away. After our year of voluntary isolation was up, he brought out the collected firearms. I wanted to see the Single Actions.

Most were clones of one type or another, Beretta, Ruger and other brands. However, there was a genuine Colt .45 with a 5½” barrel and a gun belt that would fit me. I think every kid goes through the stage of wanting to grow up to be a cowboy like in the movies. Dad said I could have my choice of the firearms and I grabbed the Colt and gun belt. He told me to pick one or two of the rifles and I took 2, Marlin Cowboys, a .45 and a .45-70. Dad took an AK-47 from one of the other groups and Mom said she had all she wanted.

So, I was off on my cowboy kick. Never let loose either; around the farm, when I'm riding, I wear the Colt and have one of the Marlins in my scabbard. All that came before the trip where I picked up my own hardware. It was a habit, I guess, and I never went anywhere without the Colt.

I didn't really take to the home schooling Mom tried. The most she could do was to teach me History. She said my grammar could use improvement but English wasn't her best course in Middle and High school. Dad never said and I knew better than ask and possibly embarrass him. I didn't know how much my education would change in the near future.

I didn't say there were no people, just that the flu killed a lot of them. Out here in the sticks, things were better, provided you didn't go to town, get infected and return home to spread it to your family. I had this friend in fifth grade and her name was Janice. We were on the same bus route and in the seven years since the school closed down, I hadn't seen her. Mostly because of Dad not wanting us infected. When I was ten years old, it didn't seem important but at seventeen, it was very important.

"Dad, I think I'll saddle up and go see Janice tomorrow."

"What did I say about avoiding people?"

"Now Bart, that's the Norman girl who was in his class. They're just down the road a ways. It's about time he thought about something besides chores."

"Mary, they could be like me and not let anyone on their place."

"In that case, I'm sure Don will leave and return home. You go ahead Don, tomorrow after you finish your chores."

"Thanks Mom. Dad if they ask me to leave, I'll be out of there like you can't believe."

"Do you think you will recognize her? Last time you saw her, she was ten and still a girl. At seventeen, she's sure to be a woman and filled out some."

I knew what he meant and I think I blushed. The thought of her growing up had entered my mind and that's why I wanted to see her. First was to make sure she survived and second to see how she'd turned out. I was curious just to see what she looked like.

That night I cleaned up before bed and ran my morning chores through my mind, gather the eggs and fill the wood box. Fifteen minutes top. The ride wouldn't take that long and if I left at 9, I should be there before 10. The first hurdle was what her father would say when I showed up. The second was, would she even recognize me? It had been seven years for me too and I'd added height, weight and even had my own guns. Working on the farm was hard work, especially after we switched to the Clydesdales.



## Pandemic – Chapter 2

“Do something for you?”

“It’s me Mr. Norman, Donald Masterson. I talked it over with Mom and Dad and they gave me permission to come see Janice. Is it ok with you too Mr. Norman?”

“You’ve grown up some.”

“Yes sir, 6’2 and about 170 pounds. Our tractor broke and we’re farming with horses.”

I saw Janice come out of the door. At least I think it was Janice. Dad was right, she filled out some.

“Is that you, Don?”

“Janice?”

“What did you expect, it has been seven years.”

“I’ve grown so I supposed you had too. Is it ok Mr. Norman?”

“Go ahead. You two can sit on the front porch swing and visit. Janice, call if you need to.”

“What did he mean by that?”

“I think maybe he was referring to you trying to take liberties.”

“Huh?”

“Putting your hands all over me.”

“I can’t say it would be an unpleasant experience, but Mom raised me better than that.”

“Do you think I’m pretty? Do you like what you see?”

“Sort of remind me of a cheerleader and what’s not to like?” (Did I say that right? Janice is drop dead gorgeous with a figure to match. She could have been the opposite, no figure and ugly as a fence post, or something like ugly with a great figure or beautiful with no figure.)

“Have you been on that farm all seven years?”

“No, I get out some. Just a while back I rode to town and got a few things.”

“There are people there?”

“Yeah, dead people. Mom had a small list and there were things the family needed. I mainly went to get ammo. Picked up some new guns too.”

“That cowboy gun?”

“No, military types of guns. The cowboy guns came from people who attacked our farm looking for food or what not. Dad told them to leave or die. They died. He sent me to the house each time to be with Mom so I wouldn’t see the bodies. I’ve got the military rifle now, so if any more come, I’ll help bury them.”

“Is it bad out there?”

“That depends on what you mean by bad. Dad said that percentage wise, more people in the US died than other countries. Something about our having good medical care.”

“Come sit, I won’t bite.”

“Yep, you sure have grown up.”

“I haven’t seen anyone my own age since the day they closed the school.”

“Sounds like you got a better education than I did.”

“Mom home schooled me using old text books she bought somewhere.”

“Mom taught me some history, but my grammar isn’t very good. I suppose I sound like a hick.”

“If you can come by more often, I can teach you.”

“I’d like that if your Dad and mine will let me.”

“Don’t worry about Daddy; I can get most anything I want from him.”

I could tell her Mom had taught her more than Mom taught me. If Janice would twist her Daddy around her finger, the only problem would be Dad. She said that we should go in and meet her Mom. That wasn’t high on my list of things to do. I went and her Mom was, uh charming I think the word is. I only stayed an hour, not wanting to wear out my welcome and afraid that if I stayed longer, Dad would have a fit.

“Have a good time boy?”

“Yep. Thanks for letting me go over Pa. You were right, she filled out some.”

“Is she as pretty as you remember?”

“No sir, about 100 times prettier. She offered to help me with my grammar and Mom said I needed some help. I sounded like a hillbilly or hick. Her Mom home schooled her using textbooks.”

“I’ll think on it; maybe if you don’t fall off on your chores. We got to scythe the grain and grass. Then, we have to pick the corn ears and don’t forget the beans; wouldn’t want to go hungry. It should be easier; I got the new axle on the buckboard.”

That would tie up several weeks. We didn’t have much hay and only small fields of wheat and oats. The beans would be pod by pod and the corn ear by ear. We had a second tractor that would run, but couldn’t go anywhere because it had a broken axle. It did give us a hammer mill powered by its Power Take Off (PTO) so we could mill the corn and oats into cattle and horse feed. Could Dad have gotten another tractor? I’m pretty sure he could, and would have if he’d had more fuel.

We had oil lamps and 4 drums of kerosene. Dad built an icehouse before the power went down permanently. It was a large ice house and took most of the winter to fill. The good news was it lasted all summer. He converted the refrigerator to use ice instead of electricity like they did when they were called iceboxes.

It wasn’t that bad living during these times. We had firewood, ice and grew our food. Mom told Dad if the harvest wouldn’t be starting right away, she’d like me to take the buckboard (wagon) and track down canning jars and more lids, if I could find them. Mom’s prized possession was her 41 quart All American canner. Assuming that Dad would say yes, I mounted a spare scabbard on the buckboard.

“Boy, I can’t let you be gone for more than 10 days. Use a pair of the Clydesdales in case you find something that we can use that is heavy. Take some ropes and tarps to tie down your cargo and protect it from the elements.”

“Dad I’m near a man fully grown. Could you either call me Don, Donald or man? I sure ain’t no boy.”

“I’ll think on it. Which rifle are you taking?”

“The Marlin .45-70.”

“And the Colt?”

“Yes sir.”

“Might want to reconsider and take that Super Match, Mossberg and Kimber. You’re going to be out there on your own, you’ll need more firepower.”

“If you say so, but I’m going to wear the Colt and have the Marlin in the scabbard. I can put the rifle and shotgun in the boot well and use that WW II tanker style shoulder holster for the Kimber.”

“That’s fine. Don’t stake your life on the Marlin or Colt.”

“Yes Dad. Any idea where I should look for the jars and lids?”

“Try Jeff City. Down US 50 a ways. State Capital, might find more guns and ammo. Maybe even find something for that girl of yours. Figure two days to get there, a day or two of looking around and two days back. Don’t go near any people if you find some living ones.”

“We ok on Kerosene and wicks?”

“Stocked up, we have plenty. Bought it in rolls and your Mom cut’s them to length. Check a feed and grain for animal medicines, here’s a list. I’ll take more smokes if you can find some. I’d imagine your Mom would like some more of the stuff you got her last time. Mind you don’t stack the buckboard too high. Here’re some gold coins in case you need them but don’t spend them all in one place.”

“What are they worth?”

“Can’t rightly say, but I paid \$300 an ounce. Should be worth 4 to 5 times worth that now. Here’s a roll each of silver halves, quarters and dimes. They’re old coins, 90% silver. This second list says how much silver is in each coin. Figure the ratio of gold to silver at 50:1.”

“You never answered me about Janice.”

“Come back in one piece and it’s ok after the harvest is done; Mom and I had a talk.”

Translation: Mom talked and Dad listened. I set out headed east. I stopped at every gun store, big box store and hardware store along the way. Didn’t find much, a few boxes of jars, some coffee, Always, 20 cartons of smokes; until I hit Jefferson City. Ruff’s hackles stood up and he started one of those low growls that always warn you there’s trouble ahead.

Pulled the horses and wagon into a small woods and retrieved my rifle and shotgun and kept the Colt as my backup. It didn’t take long moving through the woods before I could hear them. Moved to a better position to hear and improve my cover. They chatted like they didn’t have a care in the world.

“Hello the roadblock.”

“Show yourself.”

“Not on your life. What’s the roadblock all about?”

“Come here and we’ll tell you.”

“I just bet you will.”

“What do you want?”

“Ammo, canning jars and lids; a few cartons of smokes, women’s supplies.”

“We got them to trade or for outright sale; gold and silver only.”

“I can pay. What’s gold worth? I expect a price ratio between gold and silver at 50:1.”

“What kind of gold, we don’t take jewelry.”

“Bullion gold coins and old 90% silver coins.”

“Gold is \$1,500, silver \$30. We have a chart of how much silver is in those coins.”

“I do too.”

I heard an unnatural sound behind me and rolled over with the Kimber in hand. “Don’t try it mister. I got you flatfooted.”

“Harley, you got him?”

“Nah, he’s got me dead to rights. He’s got a .45 auto.”

“How many of them are there?”

“Answer and you are dead Harley.”

“I can’t tell; they could be spread out. This guy who has the drop on me has at least four weapons and I have the feeling he knows how to use them.”

“Well hell. This was supposed to be easy duty. Why don’t we just give him what he wants, get the coins and escort him on his way?”

“Give us a minute.”

“Alright, you have a deal. We’re putting down our weapons and stepping away. Bring Hartley down here.”

“Deal. If you’re lying, Harley will get it first.”

### Pandemic – Chapter 3

I barely spent an hour with Janice and my grammar is improving already.

“Move on down the hill.”

“What about my weapons?”

“I’ll bring them.”

“Are you on foot?”

“I want a lot of jars. Heck no, I’m not on foot.”

I let out a whistle and Ruff joined me, growling at the guy who tried to sneak around me.

“Don’t try anything, he doesn’t like strangers.”

“He got a name?”

“Ruff. Pure bred Shepherd and getting grumpy in his old age.”

“If you’re not on foot, how are you getting around?”

“Buckboard pulled by two large horses.”

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“He’s just a kid.”

“Seventeen mister. I can shoot too.”

“Is that why you left your safety on?”

“It’s a Garand safety and I know it’s off, you’ll have to do better than that.”

“Fancy gun. M1A?”

“Yes, Super Match. Pistol is Kimber, shotgun Mossberg, Revolver Colt SAA and I have more.” Do you have everything I need?”

“Got a list?”

“Here.”

“Jars and lids we have, extra lids are limited. Marlboro depends on how many you want. Ladies supplies, all you have room for. Anything else?”

“Sugar and salt.”

“Sugar is limited and we have a whole lot of salt. Any preference on the brand of coffee?”

“Don’t want Columbian. Folgers, Hills Brothers or Maxwell House will do fine.”

“Let me add it up on my calculator. 24 cans of coffee, \$240, 50 pounds of salt, \$25, jars \$15 a case. Extra lids, \$2 a dozen and we can spare 24 dozen pads, 24 count \$12.”

“How many pints and quarts?”

“12 cases each of pints and quarts, regular mouth.”

“So it’s 240 plus 25 plus 360 plus 48 plus 288, right?”

“That’s the total, \$961.”

“Ammo?”

“What calibers?”

“.45 Colt and .45-70 Government.”

“.45 Colt \$450 a case of cowboys loads, 500 rounds, 200 round case of full power loads, \$300. .45-70 \$500 a case of 200.”

“Ok, one case of .45 Colt cowboy loads and one case of full power loads. Two cases of .45-70. That’s 961 plus 450 plus 300 plus 1,000. New total \$2,711, agreed?”

“I’m still adding. Ok that’s right, figure a one ounce, a one half ounce, a quarter ounce and a one tenth ounce.”

“That’s more than your asking price by \$64. Have something extra to make it more even?”

“How about five more boxes of pads?”

“Close enough. Just to avoid trouble, Harley can carry your guns and you can have them back when I’m on my way.”

“That’s not much of a choice.”



“Take it or leave it. Say, we grow hogs and have some at market weight, interested in some meat?”

“What’s market weight?”

“Ours are 250 pounds and we can spare 15 at 75¢ a pound live delivery. Make it \$2,813. I get my money back and you get your bellies filled.”

“We’ll have to talk it over, any way reach you?”

“The frequency is on this slip of paper. We’ll monitor each night at 7pm.”

“We’ll let you know. Let’s go get those supplies.”

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“I got everything on the list plus.”

“Plus what?”

“Ammo for my cowboy guns. Around the time the deal was concluded, I thought of all those extra hogs. They’ll let us know, but I told them 75¢ per pound live delivery and offered 15 hogs.”

“What’s the bottom line?”

“We get paid for the extra hogs and get back more than I spent. That still leave us long on hogs, does Mr. Norman raise hogs?”

“Don’t rightly know. It’s still a few days to harvest, why don’t you ride over and ask.”

“Mr. Norman, how are you folks fixed for food?”

“Have chickens and cattle, no pork.”

“Could you use two hogs, no charge?”

“What are you leaving out of the conversation?”

“Nothing, they’re extra. Let me know quickly, I’ve got to start helping Dad with the harvest pretty soon.”

“Need a hand? You said you were farming using horses.”

“We’ve got a pull type combine that was built around the time that Columbus discovered America. Mounted 2 row corn picker and no way to use it. We have hay to harvest plus wheat and oats. Our large white beans are handpicked. We do the corn last.”

“You get me the fuel for my tractor and I’ll lend a hand with your harvest. I’m going to want more than I use, say 1,000 gallons of diesel.”

“All the fuel is bad.”

“I can restore it, if you can find it.”

“Diesel I can find, only thing I need to deliver it is a portable tank.”

“Could you find a tanker?”

“Maybe, how much of that stuff to restore it do you have?”

“Twelve gallons, enough for 24,000 gallons of fuel.”

“How long would that last?”

“Longer than I’ll need it to.”

The average farmer in our area has two tractors, a large one and a small one. The latter is used to pull wagons and such and doesn’t need much horsepower. The larger tractor mounts the implements or tows them as the case may be. Since Dad was only farming half of the land, it would take more time to mount and dismount the implements than do the work.

Mr. Norman told me where to find a portable tank that would hold 1,000 gallons but it would be up to me to convert the tanker from pull behind to horse drawn. He told me where to find diesel fuel that could be gravity fed to fill the portable tank. He even invited me in to say Hi to Janice. I wanted to, oh I wanted to; I think I was smitten with the new Janice. I begged off clumsily, telling him I’d get his fuel first.

“Dad, Mr. Norman will help us with our harvest if I can find him 1,000 gallons of diesel.”

“Don, any fuel you find will be long gone, it turns bad, you know,”

“Yes sir, I told him that. He said he had something he could add to restore it. He wants 1,000 gallons for his use and helping us with the harvest. He even told me where to find a portable tank. He said I’d have to figure out how to adapt the tongue.”

“That’s going to save us a whole lot of work. Let’s go find that tank in the morning and see what we need to do to convert it to horse drawn. You’re quite the horse trader.”

“I haven’t traded any horses, just traded for things we need and traded off things we didn’t.”

“Don, it a term used to describe someone good at making trades. You’re growing up son and can do my trades any day. Did Norman want hogs?”

“I offered him 2 for free, no strings. That’s two hogs we won’t have to feed.”

“See that gal of yours?”

“I begged off, I get all tongue tied around her. You’ll have to see her Dad, she’s some-one to behold.”

“Somehow I believe we may be seeing lots of, Janice is it?”

We had spare wagon tongues that were fashioned during the winter. If we broke a wagon tongue during harvest, we needed a quick replacement. Dad selected one suitable for two Clydesdales and we took it with us. We located the portable tank and replaced the tongue and tires. The ones on it were flat and dry rotted. It was getting late in the afternoon when we pulled into home with the tank full of rotten diesel. Filling the tanker and transporting it was a one man job, now that the wagon was converted and had good tires.

The next morning after chores, Dad got the buckboard for him and Mom and I harnessed 2 Clydesdales to pull the tanker. Mom was as nervous as a cat on a hot tin roof. An hour later, we pulled into the Norman place. Mr. Norman and Dad unloaded the two hogs and we turned to the fuel. Mr. Norman added ½ gallon (2 quarts) of something called PRI-D to the fuel and we moved the tanker up on a little rise. From there, he ran a hose to his above ground 2,000 gallon diesel tank. It took a while for the tank to drain and he invited Dad and me into the house for coffee.

Mrs. Norman, Mom and Janice were sitting at the large kitchen table drinking coffee. From the way you see people drinking coffee seven years after the Flu, you’d think it grew on trees. Our coffee always came in a can and I had no idea where it came from. I had barely sat down when Janice set a cup of coffee in front of me.

“Anything else Don?”

(Now that you mention it...Mom had a book she loved, ‘Coffee, Tea or Me?’)

I had taken the seat next to Janice, consciously or unconsciously. My money is on the former. When I finished my coffee, Janice suggested going out and sitting on the porch swing. We went and we talked about the seven years since the Flu and about the people in our 5<sup>th</sup> grade class and how she was 9 days older than me and how she’d like me to come courting.

## Pandemic – Chapter 4

If Mom told me what courting was, I must have missed it. I'll have to ask either her or Dad, maybe both.

"Dad what's courting?"

"Why do you want to know Don?"

"Janice said she'd like me to come courting."

"She's a bit forward, that one. Courting is the traditional dating period before engagement and marriage. During a courtship, a couple dates to get to know each other and decide if there will be an engagement. Usually courtship is a public affair, done in public and with family approval. Ask your Mom."

"Mom, what's courting?"

"Do they still do that?"

"Janice asked me to come courting."

"Her mother mentioned she fancied you. It's old fashioned and since the sixties and seventies, out of style. Usually a young man asks the father of the young woman he's interested in for permission to come courting. That allows them time to get to know each other in a platonic setting. It can progress to engagement and finally marriage."

"I don't know much about women."

"You'll figure it out, it's not complicated. There are some things about women, a man never figures out so don't fret about them. Most of the rest of it is simple biology. You said Janice had textbooks. Borrow one on biology. Either way, don't worry about it, we didn't always have biology textbooks and people still figured it out."

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"Mr. Norman, I'd like your permission to court Janice."

"Well, Don, what do you have to offer?"

"I learn quickly, work hard and Dad says I'm a natural born horse trader."

"Say the courting worked out and the two of you decided to get engaged and that led to marriage. Where would you live? How would you provide for your new bride? Horse trading is, in the original sense, the buying and selling of horses, also called 'Horse

Dealing'. Due to the great difficulties of evaluating the merits or demerits of a horse offered for sale, the selling of horses offered great opportunities for dishonesty. It was not to be expected that the sellers of horses would fail to capitalize on these opportunities; thus those who dealt in horses have always had a reputation for shady business practices."

"I'm not dishonest Mr. Norman. I make good trades that benefit both parties. I think we'd probably live on a farm in the area. There are a lot of abandoned farms around. I know that Dad would help me get started with some hogs and chickens. We could grow a garden and plant crops to feed the livestock and us."

"Good answer Don. We were expecting you to just start dating Janice. I like this much better, it has more style. And you knew to ask my permission first."

"No sir, I didn't. Dad explained."

"An honest horse trader, what will they think of next?"

With Mr. Norman's help, the harvest was finished much earlier and I was asked to drive his second tractor to pull the loaded wagons back to the homestead and unload them. Janice was right there to show me things I didn't know how to do. With the courtship approved, she was suddenly more restrained. Once she was old enough, she had been doing what I was now doing.

When the harvest was finished, Dad and I went looking for a good farm to use. The farm next to us on the way to the Norman farm was much like our farm, 160 acres of which 40 acres was timber next to the river. We checked the house and Dad said it was Hotel California, where you can check out but never leave. The mummified bodies were in the master bedroom. We gave them a decent burial and I said I'd go to Sedalia the next day and look for a new box spring and mattress. Dad said I'd better look for a crib, diapers and baby clothes.

I talked to Mom about what Dad said and she said I'd be getting the cart in front of the horse. It would be more important to find an old fashion gasoline powered washing machine in a museum with a wringer and tubs. Find a Maytag, she said. The next day, after chores, I harnessed the horses and rode over to that farm. I measured the mattress and headed to Sedalia. I got a new box springs and mattress from the furniture store (King size) and started hunting for a washing machine, but didn't find one.

Took the buckboard back to the new farm and swapped out the box spring and mattress. I found extra mattress pads, sheets, new pillows and a bed spread and made the bed. Then, I rode back home, put up the horses and did the evening chores. Sedalia was not a small town. Before the Flu, it was about 30,000. Even if I assumed that 20,000 people had died, where did the rest go? Where did the 20,000 bodies go? The only Museum I found was an Art Museum.

“There’re a lot of empty houses in Sedalia, Dad. I need a gasoline powered washing machine, but couldn’t find one. I think I should go in every day and check out houses. I figure I can find a pressure canner, a bunch of jars and maybe a gas powered washing machine.”

“Gets mighty cold in the winter; you dress warm. Don’t get much snow in the area so you should be able to go most days. You might ask Norman if Janice can go with you on some of the trips.”

Over the course of the winter, we found bodies in many houses. We also found pressure canners, jars, lids, spices in sealed bags, the washing machine with tubs, a wood/coal burning furnace, 2 wood burning kitchen stoves, and a Franklin stove for the living room. I couldn’t move everything; some was just plain too heavy. When that happened, Dad and/or Mr. Norman would go in with me the next day and we’d get it moved and installed. Found a gasoline powered wood splitter for the firewood and a new chainsaw and all kinds of spoiled gasoline. Mr. Norman added a little of the PRI stuff to each five gallon can.

On February 14, I asked Janice to marry me. She teased a minute and said yes. We went to talk to her mother and father and set a date. I had no idea where we could find someone to marry us. Mr. Norman said he was an ordained Lutheran minister who left preaching when he became disenchanted with it many years before. Problem solved.

We also found food supplies in warehouses and the back rooms of grocery stores. It all went back and was divided up with us getting a ½ share and Dad and Mr. Norman getting a ¼ share each. Mr. Norman’s first name was Paul and Janice’s Mom’s name was Shirley. Janice pointed that out, suggesting I keep it at Mr. and Mrs. until told differently. The wedding was small, 6 people, and happened on the first Saturday in June, 2018. If you’re counting, that made the Pandemic during the winter of 2009-2010.

The wedding gifts were mostly practical, two Clydesdales and two harness/saddle horses from my family. From the Normans, a covered wagon, not a Conestoga, plus one bred cow. Dad gave me one boar and three gilts. I had my choice of chickens. Janice’s gift to me was a gun safe her father and Dad had gotten and moved to the new home. My gift to her was complicated. I gave her the Marlin 1894 Cowboy in .45 Colt, a Ruger Vaquero (pre-2006) Dad had taken off a dead attacker with the 5½” barrel, a Browning Hi-Power with spare magazines and a Springfield Armory M1A Loaded, also from a dead attacker. I explained that I wouldn’t always be nearby and either she learned to defend herself or got raped and possibly killed.

It was a good idea, but Mr. Norman was way ahead of me. She had her own shotgun, an older Remington 870 12 gauge, with a 26” full choke barrel, a 20” improved cylinder barrel with rifle sights and a 3 round magazine extension. Her rifle was a family heirloom, a Winchester model 62 which shot LR, not gallery loads. Her MBR was a Ruger Mini-14 with genuine Ruger 20 round magazines. Strange for the daughter of a preach-

er to be armed to the teeth, I thought. Well, he more than most probably knew the failing of the human species.

I didn't have any trouble figuring out the biology part. Mr. Norman plowed and disked the fields and planted the assortment of crops I'd selected. Before the fields, he'd plowed, disked and dragged a large garden spot and Janice and I planted the heirloom seeds we were down to using.

We went for 20 acres of hay, 20 acres of beans, 20 acres of wheat, 20 acres of oats, 20 acres of corn leaving the remaining 15 acres as pasture. The homestead, including the garden, covered 5 acres and there were 40 acres of timber, 160 in total. Since the Flu, fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides and manufactured chemicals had run out and were replaced with natural fertilizer and cultivation to remove the weeds.

Herbicides and pesticides were relatively recent additions to farming. We had sought out and located seed companies and had taken their stock of heirloom seeds. These were the real deal, not hybrid and not GM. I hauled another three loads of diesel over the course of the summer, keeping Paul's tank topped off. I also found some good used farm equipment for Pa, allowing him to use a tractor for the first time in years. With the final load of diesel delivered, I sought out farm tanks and collected the rotten gasoline. Paul added PRI-G and the gas was divided between Dad and me.

I could have found a pickup or SUV and Janice and I discussed it. There was no place we needed to go or wanted to go that we couldn't go using our horses and sometimes the wagon. The last attack on our place had been about 4 years earlier when I was just 14. I set about clearing the dead falls and standing dead trees from the timber, using a Clydesdale to drag them back and my equipment to convert the logs into firewood.

I also helped Janice weed and can from the garden. Dad helped me build an ice house and we moved some ice from his ice house to ours, giving us a freezer and a working ice box. I got the real deal when I found the washing machine; the people were collectors of some sort. I also found old kerosene lamps in their basement and kerosene where we usually got kerosene. I took 6 drums and several rolls of wicks home, from the hardware store, to provide light. They had an old fashion ice box, an antique.

During early August, Janice told me she was pregnant. I made a fool of myself like I assume most first time fathers do when they hear for the first time that his wife is expecting. I fussed over her until she put her foot down and told me to 'cool it'. One of the first lessons I'd learned after getting married was the penalty of non-obedience. She suddenly 'wasn't in the mood'.

I got a turkey near dusk out in the pasture feeding on grass. I cleaned it, plucked it and put it up for Thanksgiving. Shirley looked in their attic and came up with a crib and playpen. She had also saved the old cotton diapers, preferring them to disposables. Mom had some too, and between them, we had enough. We filled the basement coal room with firewood and gave some to Paul and Dad. We still had a bunch and there were a

few more standing dead trees to cut down. Missouri had a lot of coal, high sulfur, but coal. About 85% of Missouri's energy came from coal fueled plants using coal imported from Wyoming.

Over Thanksgiving, held at the Normans, the subject of coal was brought up. Mr. Norman was a wealth of information, pulling out a list of coal powered plants. If we could find a reasonable means of transport, we could haul a lifetime supply of low sulfur coal. That was easier because it had already been mined. If we got really lucky and found a loaded coal train, Sedalia was a railhead. Did I want to be an engineer?

"Not at the moment. Let's get past Christmas and New Year's. I'm willing any time after that."

"Good, I'll need time to find more PRI-D."

The city of Sedalia gets its electrical power from KCPL. Their nearest generating station was Montrose. The rural area got its power from Central Missouri Electric Co-op. Their power is generated in Springfield and distributed by a company based in Jefferson City, their so-called three-tier system. Montrose Lake was much closer than Springfield. After the first of the year, we looked for and found a dump truck that wouldn't run and needed new tires. So, while Dad and Paul worked on the truck, I fueled a diesel pickup put on new tires and headed to Montrose Lake. Clinton was about 50 miles from Sedalia and the Lake was a ways west of there.

Driving a pickup truck is not the same as driving a farm tractor. It had an automatic transmission 4WD and Dad and Paul had gone over the vehicle carefully making sure it was ready to go. In short order, I was sitting at the power station looking at a huge pile of coal and a mile long coal train. I returned home and told them what I'd found.

"Don, have you ever read a Patriot Fiction story titled, *The Lodge*?"

"No, is it important?"

"It was written about the Montrose Station. When I first read the story, I started checking out power generation in the state of Missouri. The nearest plant is Montrose Station, as nearly as I can tell. The way I see it, after we refresh the fuel in the diesel electric engine's tanks, our main obstacle will be the switches between there and here."

"Did you get the dump truck running?"

"It ran fine once we put in some PRI-D and let it sit. Had to hunt for new tires to make it road worthy and it's ready to go. I don't suppose, in your travels around Sedalia, you found more wood/coal burning furnaces or wood burning stoves, did you?"



## Pandemic – Chapter 5

“We stopped looking after we found one. Found 2 wood burning kitchen stoves by then, too. However, if we found one, there must be more.”

“Our propane tank is nearly empty. Makes sense to switch to coal. How about you Bart?”

“We have a smaller tank that we’ve refilled from time to time. I agree, propane is getting difficult to find. It would be a good idea to switch to a wood/coal furnace and a wood burning kitchen stove. Then, all we’d need propane for was hot water.”

“You have a source?”

“Yes. Don, could you refill Paul’s tank and then ours and finally yours?”

“Sure. Don’t know how much is left, but it can’t be the only source.”

“Paul, before now I didn’t let Don drive a motor vehicle. He has been along and knows how to load the delivery truck and fill the tank when we got home. Now that he has driven a vehicle, we might as well let his younger legs do the work.”

“Lincoln freed the slaves!”

“Only in the south.”

“Missouri was a southern state. I’m not going to win am I?”

“Try, you might get lucky.”

“I’ll tell Janice that I’m going in for a load of propane and when to expect me back. She might want to go along and drive the pickup back so we can keep the delivery truck out here.”

“Don’t forget your firearms; you never know what you might run into.”

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“Hon, I have to go in for a load of propane. I thought you might like to come along and drive the pickup back. Your Dad said not to forget our firearms. I’ve been in Sedalia I don’t know how many times and have never needed one.”

“It’s best to humor Daddy. If we don’t need them, it’s an inconvenience, if we do, they’d be irreplaceable.”

“You want your Ruger or M1A?”

“Ruger and the Browning.”

“In that case, I’ll use your M1A and my Kimber.”

Janice and I drove to Sedalia with me directing her to the propane dealer. I got out and fired up the truck before waving to let her know she could return home. I concentrated on getting the delivery truck loaded and not security. When I had the tank loaded, I turned to shut down the valves when a shot rang out, neatly cutting a chunk from my left ear lobe, up high. I was shocked, nothing like this had happened since the last time the farm was attacked.

The rifle was on the truck seat and I used the Kimber to lay down suppressing fire so I could get to the rifle. When I reached it, I fed a round into the chamber and paused to think about how I wanted to approach this. Janice was ok, she should be home by now and I simply couldn’t see where the shooter was located or if he was moving around just out of sight from one position to the next.

The best approach seemed to be moving to the left and circling around the storage tank and equipment and come in on the attacker’s right flank. I moved slowly trying to avoid giving my changing position away. No luck, halfway there, another shot rang out striking a pipe where, moments before, my head had been. Next came a series of shots not aimed at me and sounding more like a smaller caliber rifle. The Mini-14? No, Janice went home!

“Don, you can come out now, I shot him.”

But, she went home...I didn’t expose myself but hurried to my destination. The man was on the ground, Jan standing over him, belly and all.

“How...”

“I stalled the pickup and then flooded the engine. I just got it running when I heard the first shot. You’re hurt!”

“Hurts like heck, too. I think he cut a gouge out of my ear, by the feel of it.”

“It’s at the top, bleeding. Do you have a first aid kit?”

“In the pickup. Where’s the pickup?”

“Sitting where I stalled it out. Do you have anything in your pockets to use as a band-  
age?”

“I have a clean handkerchief. Will that work?”

“I’ll make it work. Is the truck filled?”

“I was just checking the valves, making certain I’d closed them all.”

She fussed a minute with my left ear and said, “That’s the best I can do for the moment, finish up and drive me back to the pickup and we’ll get home and let your Mom put a better bandage on.”

“Wait while I hop out and get his firearms, magazines and ammo.”

Nice rifle, FAL; looks like the one in the picture Dad had, STG-58. Handgun was an old German Luger. No shotgun. The knife was special, a Cold Steel Bowie, long blade, razor sharp. Not very practical, mainly a fighting knife. Backpack filled with ammo, took it to sort out later.

“Got some loot.”

“I see; what kind of rifle is that?”

“I think it’s a FAL. We’ll have to ask Dad or Paul.”

“How’s your ear?”

“It hurts. I don’t think it will kill me, but it hurts.”

“Where did he come from?”

“You should have asked him before you shot him. No wallet so no license. Here we are, start it up and I’ll follow you home.”

Mom was working on my ear and Janice was showing Dad our loot.

“STG-58, good rifle. Knife is a Laredo Bowie. Pistol is a Luger 08, collector’s item. Any idea where he came from?”

“No sir.”

“If you found him at the propane dealer, he was probably there for propane.”

“So?”

“Might be more people in the area.”

“Oh. Do you think we should add more propane tanks and stock up? We’d need 4 of those 1,100s to give each of us 3,000 gallons.”

“Is he going to be ok Mary?”

“Nasty scar when it heals.”

“I’ll go fill Paul’s tank and then yours. Top off ours if there’s any left. You go home and start these antibiotics. Paul and I will arrange for more tanks and delivery trucks. You keep the stuff you took off that guy, spoils of war.”

“Here’re some pain pills, for at night, if you need them.”

“Thanks Mom.”

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I got a week off to recuperate. During that time, Dad or Paul did our chores and installed the 4 tanks. They were plumbed in and filled and the last 9,000 gallons of propane were divided among 3 delivery trucks. Then, Dad told me to get off my lazy butt; we had a trainload of coal to move. He and Paul had come up with a way to move the switches and he’d drive the train while Paul and I worked ahead of him moving the switches to the correct positions.

“Each of the switches has an emergency lever so it can be moved during a power failure. We’re going to use those emergency levers to set the switches Don. We’ll run ahead of Bart and set the switches. With luck, we’ll be in Sedalia by early afternoon.”

Paul had an area map with all of the switches marked and once the locomotive was ready to go, we raced ahead setting switches. It took 2 hours for Dad to get the train from Montrose Station to Sedalia. Montrose used a machine to lift and dump the cars and we had nothing like it. The cars didn’t have the bottom dumps and the rail line ran east and west, not north and south. I figured it would be time to use a grain scoop and unload 16 tons of coal a day, thanks Ernie. Paul had a better idea, go Paul. We’d use a crane with a clamshell bucket to lift the coal from the rail cars and drop it into the dump truck. We could drive the load of coal to one of the places and dump it, return and get another load.

While I’d been tending to my wound, they’d found wood burning kitchen stoves and wood/coal burning furnaces. They forgot to mention that, another oops. Paul said we could handle three loads a day and it wouldn’t interfere with our chores or other responsibilities. During the same time, Jan had measured the distance between the wound and the center of my nose – 4¼”. Didn’t allow enough for windage.

Since there was enough firewood for the moment, we moved coal on M-W-F. I moved the wood from the coal room and shoveled it full of coal. It held about 2 truckloads. This house was old and didn’t have any insulation in the walls. There were solutions, just no simple solutions. A few years back, a person could contract and have foam injected into the walls of an old home. I didn’t know of anyone who fit that bill in the area.

We also had a small problem; the coal was disappearing from the train faster than we were removing it. We would have shared, but nobody asked. And, the body of the guy was gone from the propane dealer's place. Dad brought it up and asked what Paul and I thought we should do about it. I was dumbstruck, Dad asking me what to do?

We discussed several things and outlined a relatively low key plan of action. When we turned in that night, I mentioned the plan to Jan.

"You've changed."

"In what way?"

"There is an example, you asked in what way instead of how. There was an educated man hiding behind the façade of a hillbilly."

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. First Corinthians 13:11."

"You be careful out there, you'll be a new father in April."

"I just needed someone with good grammar as an example. My parents don't talk like hillbillies, but my mother wasn't good working with me on my grammar."

We cuddled and were soon asleep. My natural alarm clock (bladder) woke me around six and I got up, made coffee and showered. Today was Tuesday, not our normal day to get coal from the train. After chores were done and breakfast eaten, Paul, Dad and I drove to Sedalia. We parked well back from the train and approached on foot, carefully at the last. There they were, bold as brass using grain shovels to transfer coal to a pickup. Apparently, they hadn't figured out how to hot wire the crane.

We allowed them to fill the pickup and I went to get my pickup while Dad and Paul followed them on foot. They kept in touch with portable CB radios. I eased up to them and they climbed in the pickup. Paul indicated where he'd seen them turn off on a road east of town, going north. There was a skiff of snow on the road and following them at a distance became easy. I followed their tracks right up to a long driveway leading to a set of farm buildings.

"Park it here and we'll go up on foot Don."

"Ok Dad."

"Don, use your scope and get the range from here to those buildings."

"745 meters Paul."

## Pandemic – Chapter 6

“Ok, 815 yards, just short of a half mile. We’ll use the cover of those trees on either side of the driveway to move in closer.”

“We never decided what we were going to do when we confronted them.”

“Play it by ear Bart?”

“Suits me.”

“Follow your Dad’s and my lead Don.”

“Are we taking the shotguns or rifles?”

“Both. Sling the shotgun over your back and carry the rifle. You brought that six-shooter? Where is your Kimber?”

“It’s in my shoulder holster. The six-shooter is my backup.”

“Take it slow; we don’t know what they will have out for guards.”

They didn’t have guards out, was the answer to that question. Moving slowly, we stopped about 50 yards from the house and called out, “Hello the house.”

They came boiling out of the house armed for bear. Really. Most of the guns were hunting rifles and we learned that they ranged from a .270 up to a .375 H&H magnum. Some had shotguns, but all had rifles. There were a few military firearms, mostly assault guns, none American. They spread out and took cover. If we meant them harm, they’d have all been dead by now; they didn’t know yet where we were.

“What do you want?”

“We want to discuss you taking our coal.”

“It’s there for the taking.”

“Only because we hunted down the train and moved it to Sedalia.”

“You took all the propane.”

“Yes we did; from Sedalia. That’s not the only source of propane out there. Was your man the one that tried to kill our man at the propane dealer’s?”

“He’s dead.”

“I know; my daughter shot him while he was shooting at her husband from ambush.”

“Charlie wouldn’t have done that.”

“Tell me why my son-in-law is wounded?”

That hushed them and they began a conversation that we couldn’t hear. Finally, the guy who had been speaking for the group said, “Charlie was a bit of a hot head sometimes. You took his weapons and ammo, do we get them back?”

“Spoils of war.”

“What war?”

“The war you started by shooting at my son-in-law.”

“What about the coal?”

“You didn’t ask. There’s enough for both and more where it came from. The point is, you didn’t ask, but knew enough not to get coal on M-W-F. I take it that none of you got the swine flu?”

“Some did, some didn’t. Those that did got over it with Relenza. How many of you are there?”

“Enough to do the job.”

“You live in Sedalia?”

“Not in town, no.”

“Where exactly do you live?”

“Somewhere else.”

“You’re a real fountain of information, aren’t you?”

“We should tell you so you could come in the dark of night and attack us? I don’t think so.”

“Can we work this out?”

“Step out from cover and we’ll do the same.”

“Ok, you next. Three of you? That’s all?”

“Like I said, enough to do the job.”

“Come in out of the cold and have some tea.”

“You don’t have coffee?”

“Someone got it. Was it you?”

“The early bird gets the worm.”

“Man, do you have a cliché for everything?”

“Got a few.” They’re selling coffee in Jeff City, ten dollars a can.”

“Sounds cheap.”

“Small cans. I’m Paul, he’s Bart and Don here is my son-in-law.”

“I’m John, and I speak for the group.”

About then a 16-17 year-old blonde entered. Comely, and really forward. The first words out of her mouth were, “Fresh meat.”

“We’re all happily married men Miss.”

She set down the tray, got a pouty look on her face and left.

“Don’t mind her, all of her brains ended up in her chest.”

“One of you her father?”

“No, her family is dead. Some of our families came through ok, some didn’t. She sees to the needs of the single men.”

“Do you mean to say...?”

“Oldest profession in the world.”

“That would be the last thing our group needs.”

“I’m guessing there are six of you, not counting children.”

“You’d be close.”

“How do you move so much coal at a time?”



“We got a dump truck running, put new tires on, hotwired that crane with the clamshell bucket and use it to move the coal to the dump truck. We can haul 3 loads per day. Probably have enough now for a couple of years.”

“Show us how to hot wire it so we can use it?”

“Do you have stabilized diesel fuel?”

“Lots.”

“Which stabilizer?”

“PRI-D.”

“Yeah, if you replace the fuel you use.”

“Not a problem. What do you have in the way of livestock; we like to start growing our own meat.”

“Hogs, cattle, horses and chickens.”

“What do you have to trade?”

“Nothing you’d want. We can buy them though.”

“What means of exchange?”

“We have US bullion coins. We must have gotten to that one first.”

“We sold market weight hogs to Jefferson City for 75¢ a pound live delivery converted to gold at \$1,500 an ounce and silver at \$30 an ounce.”

“We wouldn’t need market weight hogs.”

“The hell we don’t,” another man said. “I’m hungry now and don’t want to wait the time it takes to feed them to market weight.”

“I guess we need some of both.”

“Tell me what you need and we’ll meet at the coal train. Do you agree to the price?”

“Yeah, 75¢ a pound.”

“We’re leaving and won’t be back to bother you as long as we’re not bothered. Keep in mind that we know where you live and you don’t know where we live.”

“I’m sure we could find where you live.”

“No doubt; don’t.”

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That was the beginning of the truce with the other group in the area. There were more, but at the time neither they nor we knew about them. On April 14, 2019, our daughter Cheryl Lynn was born. She seemed to have all the working parts, 10 fingers, 10 toes, etc. I learned the joys of changing diapers, fast. We’d found a changing table at a house in town and that made the process easier.

Jan produced enough milk to keep Cheryl fed and as the time came to feed her baby food, we ground our own using a hand cranked food mixer, another item from the collectors in town. It wasn’t an antique, it was an expensive Dual Speed Hand-Crank Mixer made by the Amish if the information in the box was accurate. They had bought it from Lehman’s and it had been expensive.

Dad had never had a generator; and, since he didn’t have PRI-D, PRI-G or a large propane tank, that made sense. He had workarounds for things that required power. Like an ice house and ice box. The tractor with the broken axle could still power the hammer mill. It ran a lot better when Paul gave Dad some PRI-G.

There were apparently large volumes of diesel fuel to be had and Paul now had a very large supply of PRI-D. I started to think how much nicer it would be to have a source of electricity, like a diesel generator. Maybe something that didn’t use a lot of fuel.

“Dad, it would be nice to have a generator. Do you know where I could find one?”

“I have some information on the computer. It’s a file that shows every Cummins Distributor in the US. There are three actually located in Missouri, but you would have to look at the file to see who is the closest. What size do you want?”

“It doesn’t have to be huge. Anything that could produce 100 amps if necessary for a small amount of fuel usage.”

“Cummins had something I looked at once but didn’t buy. It was called a Quiet Diesel 12.5. I have a specifications file for that, too. If I recall correctly, it used 0.11gph at no load, 0.75gph at half load and 1.2gph at full load. If you ran it 24/7 and used the central air, you’d burn maybe 1gph. That’s 24gpd or 8,766gpy. Does Paul have enough of that PRI stuff?”

“Several drums I’m told.”

“And you do recall where you saw that large supply of diesel, don’t you?”

## Pandemic – Chapter 7

“Yes sir, Montrose Station. I read that story Paul had on his computer, apparently they have 350,000 gallons of diesel. All I would need is a generator, a very large diesel tank and a means of transport.”

“Notice any construction going on when you were out and about?”

“What kind of construction?”

“Like new tanks for a truck stop.”

“I think, no I know, I saw some when I made that trip to Jefferson City.”

“Still on the trailer?”

“Yes sir.”

“Remember how big it was?”

“Huge! Something like ten foot in diameter, 4 paces.”

“How long?”

“About 29 paces.”

“Forty thousand gallon tank, Don.”

“Maybe the three of us could go get it and get it back here. Get a piece of county equipment to excavate a hole, bury the tank. If there’s more than one, get them all.”

“There were four that size plus some smaller.”

“Smaller in what way?”

“Shorter, 24 paces.”

“Thirty thousand gallon if they were the same diameter.”

“Yes sir, 4 paces diameter.”

“How many of those?”

“Same number, four.”

“So, in total, enough space to store 280,000 gallons of fuel?”

“Yes sir. It would pretty much empty out the tank at Montrose.”

“No point in getting the tanks and fuel if we can’t get generators.”

“You know, there’s always Koehler, Wisconsin.”

“You’ve given this a lot of thought, haven’t you?”

“In some ways, yes; in others, no. There is so much I don’t know about things because of my education being cut short by the flu.”

“Are you blaming me?”

“Not at all Dad, we’re alive, aren’t we? That seems not to be the case with much of the population. I guess I let myself be a hillbilly instead of growing up as I should have. Now, with a family, I want to provide more for them and our families, as we’re able.”

“And, you think having electricity will do that?”

“It couldn’t hurt. If you’ll give me a printout of that list of Cummins Distributors, I’ll look until I find six of the units and rebuild kits.”

“Why six?”

“How long does it take to rebuild one?”

“I see what you mean. Plus you can wire them up so you have the second running while the first is cooling down for an oil change.”

“That’s what I had in mind, continuous power.”

“What would you use for fuel when we’ve used up the diesel at Montrose?”

“Biodiesel. I have to hunt around and find a small commercial rig to convert oil crops to biodiesel. We will need an oil press, too. I’ve studied the subject some and rapeseed produces canola oil. That’s much more productive than soybeans and the meal can feed livestock.”

“You need company?”

“No, I need someone to keep an eye on Janice and lend a hand if need be. How much do those generators weigh?”

“650 pounds?”

“So, if I took a trailer, I could haul six plus rebuild kits. I might have to overload something if I find a few drums of oil.”

“Why not rig a trailer with a ball hitch on the back and pull two trailers?”

“Is that legal?”

“Is anything illegal these days?”

“So if I was able to get some military weapons to improve our defenses, no one would say anything?”

“I’m sure those we used them against would object.”

“Any suggestions?”

“Medium and short range weapons. Might look for a .50 caliber sniper rifle or a .338 Lapua. Remington made the M24A3 SWS in .338 Lapua for the Army. Called it the new Remington Modular Sniper Rifle (MSR) combining lethal accuracy at 1500 meters with a user adjustable folding stock, free-floating hand guard, and the potential to change barrel lengths and calibers within minutes at the user level from .338 Lapua Magnum to .338 Norma Magnum to .300 Winchester Magnum to 7.62mm NATO. Barrett made the .50 caliber rifles for the Army, the M107. It’s basically their M82A1M with the monopod. If you get one, make sure you get the Barrett Optical Ranging System and a German scope.”

“Where do I get all different kinds of ammo?”

“Independence, Missouri. The Lake City Plant loads everything up to 20mm. Might want to wait and take a semi.”

“Maybe I should take a semi to begin with.”

“Find a U Haul 24’ truck. Good truck to learn on. Should haul the generators and you can always hook on a trailer if you find oil. You check the book and see what filters you need for the generators and take all you can find. For our needs, a U Haul truck and a trailer should haul enough ammunition. Gas truck engine, you’ll need to take stabilized gas with you. Once you bring back the generators, we’ll start hauling the tanks and then bury them all at once.”

“When do I go to Independence?”

“When you get back. Take Jan with you to cover your back. She can store up some breast milk and Mary or Shirley can take care of Cheryl.”

“Take her now or when I go to Independence?”

“You asked about going to Independence, so Independence.”

“How am I going to load 650 pound generators?”

“I imagine they’re on pallets so use a pallet jack. Want me to go instead?”

“No. I’ll go.”

“I hope you don’t have any more questions, I’m running out of answers. When we get to the guns, I’ll print you some pictures. When we get to ammo, I’ll write it all down.”

I planned to leave the next day. However, when I went out to do the chores, Ruff didn’t come running like he usually did. I found him where he usually slept, dead. I got an old towel and wrapped him up the best I could, dug the hole and laid him to rest. After the hole was filled, I did the chores and went into the kitchen.

“What kept you?”

“Ruff died during the night. I’m not hungry, just coffee.”

“Are you still going today, or do you want to wait? I know you had Ruff for a long time.”

“No, putting the trip off a day won’t bring him back. Just so you know, I’m taking a U Haul truck and trailer to look for generators. I found some fuel tanks on that trip I made to Jefferson City. When I get back, our fathers will move the tanks here to the three farms and you and I will take the truck and trailer over to Independence to get ammo from the plant. Dad suggested you save up some breast milk so one of our mothers can care for Cheryl.”

“I’m sorry about Ruff.”

“Probably won’t be able to find another pure bred Shepherd either.”

“Why the trip for ammo, don’t we have enough?”

“There are some things you can never have too much of.”

“I can think of a few besides ammo.”

“Personal products, toilet paper and coffee come to mind.”

“That’s most of them. Current medicines would be nice, like those antibiotics your Mom gave to you. They were way past their expiration date.”

“Most medicine’s expiration dates assume suboptimal storage conditions during which they maintain their optimal effect. Store them correctly and the life can be up to 5-10 times longer. Only a few drugs must be replaced at the manufacturer’s expiration date, like epinephrine or cyclines.”

“How long will you be gone?”

“Until I find six generators of a particular model, rebuild kits, replacement filters and hopefully motor oil. All three homes have 100 amp service panels and I’m looking for highly economical diesel generator capable of providing 100 amps. I want three primary generators plus three spares.”

“Cheryl is six months old today and, just so you know, I’m pregnant again.”

“I’ll be extra careful then and make sure I get home in one piece.”

“You’d better! You get yourself killed and I’ll track you down and kill you a second time.”

Dad took me to Sedalia and dropped me off. I got the U Haul truck and trailer from Sedalia, replaced the tires with new tires already mounted on rims, added spares and returned home to load the two drums of treated gas. I said my goodbyes and followed the roads marked in the road atlas sitting on the seat. It was roughly 120 miles to Springfield. I’d make note of anything of interest on the way down and check them out on the way home, assuming I had the room and the truck or trailer could handle the weight.

I found the Cummins Distributor and picked up three generators, two rebuild kits, a large supply of the oil, air and gas filters and drums of 15w-40 from a petroleum distributor. I packed the area above the generators on the truck full of personal products and toilet paper and the space in the trailer above the oil drums with cases of coffee. My next stop was Joplin.

I found one generator there and a large supply of filters but no rebuild kits. Didn’t find any oil. I did find more personal products, toilet paper and coffee. Next stop was Tulsa. Found two generators, ten rebuild kits, enough filters to fill out the truck and more drums of oil. I’d only been on the road four days and had all I had room for, considering weight limits. Packed the passenger side of the truck with personal supplies and headed home.

Returning was quicker than the trip down and I didn’t stop at any of the locations I’d noted on the way down, they weren’t going anywhere and I didn’t have room. Looking back, I’m happy I didn’t since I was alone.

“Your back! That was fast; get what you were looking for?”

## Pandemic – Chapter 8

“Six QD 12.5s, lots of oil and filters, twelve rebuild kits. I had to go all the way to Tulsa. If we need more oil, we can get it in Tulsa, couldn’t bring back all I found.

“I’ve been using the breast pump and saving the milk for the trip to Independence.”

“How many tanks have they hauled back?”

“Two per day. They’re all parked at Mom and Dad’s. They found two huge diesel double tankers and went after them today. Mom drove them over the first day and they’ve been dropping the trailers and going back the next day in the tractors for another pair of trailers.”

“I got you a large supply of your pads plus coffee and toilet paper. I noted a few places on the way down to check out on the trip back, but didn’t because I was fully loaded.”

“Get any medical supplies?”

“Not this trip. I’ll need to locate drug distribution warehouses to get the latest expiration dates and I simply didn’t take the time.”

“Are you thinking of going back?”

“Maybe later.”

◦

Individuals either have, or do not have, the Rhesus factor (or Rh D antigen) on the surface of their red blood cells. Blood plasma is the yellow liquid component of blood, in which the blood cells in whole blood would normally be suspended. It makes up about 55% of the total blood volume. It is mostly water (92% by volume) and contains dissolved proteins, glucose, clotting factors, mineral ions, hormones and carbon dioxide (plasma being the main medium for excretory product transportation). Blood plasma is prepared by spinning a tube of fresh blood in a centrifuge until the blood cells fall to the bottom of the tube. The blood plasma is then poured or drawn off.

During WW II, a method of drying blood plasma was developed and a dried blood plasma packaged for the armed forces. The resulting Army-Navy dried plasma package came in two tin cans containing 400 cc bottles. One bottle contained enough distilled water to completely reconstitute the dried plasma contained within the other bottle. In about three minutes, the plasma would be ready to use and could stay fresh for around four hours. Serum albumin replaced dried plasma for combat use during the Korean War.

◦



“So, you’ve got the tanks and transports; what can I do to help?”

“Do like we discussed and go to Independence. Here’s the deal on the ammo; in 5.56 get M855 or M855A1 and M995, in 7.62 get M118LR, M80 ball and M993, .50 caliber, get Mk211MP and those 120 round cans of M33 that Barrett got from Lake City. In handgun calibers, you’ll have to settle for ball ammo, FMJ because the military doesn’t use hollow points. We have plenty of hollow points so that doesn’t matter. Get plenty of 7.62 and .50 caliber in belts. You get that, unload it here and head for Fort Leonard Wood.

“Down there, you cut the locks off the bunkers and get smoke grenades, incendiary grenades, concussion grenades and fragmentation grenades. Don’t leave any you don’t have to. Find 3 .50 caliber machineguns and 3 M240B 7.62 caliber machineguns. One last thing, look for more of the Mk211MP, they may have it while Lake City doesn’t. Finally, find three M107s. If you can’t, you’ll have to make a trip to the factory in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

“Oh, I almost forgot. We need rockets. Maybe Javelins and M136 AT4s but I’d prefer the M72 LAW. The Army switched from the LAW to the AT4s in 1987. Generally thought of as a Vietnam War era weapon which had been superseded by more powerful and sophisticated designs such as the SMAW and AT4, the M72 LAW found a new lease of life in the ongoing (2006) operations in Iraq by the US Army, so who knows what you’re going to find?”

“That’s a lot of traveling Dad. I doubt Jan has that much milk stored.”

“Cheryl is 6 months old; she can use cow’s milk. It’s more important for you to have someone to cover your back.”

“Jan’s pregnant.”

“She can’t be far along.”

“I just found out when I started that generator hunting trip.”

“She’d tell you as soon as she was sure. We can’t spare anyone else to go with you so it’s go by yourself or take Jan. I’m totally opposed to you going to Kansas City on your own. Besides, if you check that distributor list, there’s a Cummins distributor in Kansas City, Kansas. It’s on the other side of the Missouri from the plant so you’ll have to find a bridge.”

“Ok, we’ll go tomorrow, get the ammo and what we can find at the Cummins distributor and come back to drop it off before we go to Fort Leonard Wood. I’ve got it all written down and we’ll look until we’ve got it all. That includes going to Barrett in Murfreesboro, if necessary.”

“You might want to go to Barrett even if it’s not necessary. They have a couple of rifles that might make life easier. That .416 caliber single shot model 99, the REC 7 in 6.8 SPC and the 98 Bravo in .338 Lapua. You should be able to get ammo for them at Barrett and or Lake City.”

“Slow down while I write this down. You want a 6.8 in preference to a 7.62?”

“Only as an assault rifle. Better than a 5.56, not the same as a 7.62. Different weapons for different applications. May not need any... why take the chance?”

o

I still had the cutting torch in the U Haul truck along with the pry bar so gaining entry wouldn’t be a problem as long as no one was there. Breaking into a business was one thing, but an ammo plant large enough to show on the maps? Jan and I talked on the way up and decided we’d look to see where the ammo was loaded for shipment on the theory that it was accumulated at several loading points. Ammo is heavy and the most likely means of movement was probably like the coal, using trains. A closer look at the map showed several train spurs within the confines of the plant. A spur split off the main line at the northwestern corner, turned to the south and split up all over the place. Without actually seeing the insides of the facility, we couldn’t be sure although I expected warehouses next to those tracks.

In the interests of future National Security, I’ll not explain what we found where. Suffice it to say that when we left we had about all the ammo the truck could carry. Jan and I agreed to keep the trailer empty until we hit Cummins. Lots of filters, 3 generators, 3 rebuild kits. Hit a Walgreens and got new antibiotics, birth control, pain meds (they don’t really go bad) and over the counter things like cough syrups, bandages and tape. And, of course, the ever present personal items. Tylenol is fairly stable while aspirin turns to a strong vinegar smell telling you to avoid it.

With a bit of room remaining, we hit the Costco in Independence and the one in Kansas City Missouri. Took a few things from both stores, mostly medications, 50 pound bags of rice and Folgers. There was enough we didn’t take to justify a second trip, later. Flatly ran out of space and the truck and trailer groaned at every bump in the road forcing us to take it easy.

We got home and I went looking for Paul and Dad to help me unload. While I hadn’t found any Mk211MP, I had every other ammo item Dad mentioned and lots of it. It was temporarily stored in the machine shed on Dad’s farm. Jan spent some time with Cheryl and gave her to me when she needed her diaper changed. They were making excellent progress in getting the tanks buried and connected in accordance with the information contained in an advertising brochure describing the various double walled tanks. They were taking their time and doing what appeared to be a professional job.

The next morning Cheryl was dropped off at my Mom's for her chance to spoil her. Leonard Wood wasn't that far and the torch had us onto the post quickly. I needed a map to find the ammunition bunkers and the torch to cut the locks. I moved from bunker to bunker cutting the locks while Jan opened each one and noted the contents. She found the Mk211 and circled that bunker number in red. We proceed with caution, not completely trusting the reliability of the packaging. Javelins check, M136 AT4s check, M72 LAWs check, smoke grenades check, incendiary (Thermate) check, fragmentation check, concussion check, M107s no joy, M2HB with spare barrel check, M240B with spare barrel check. Extra Ma Deuce barrels check, extra M240B barrel with headspacing equipment check. Additional items: body armor and extra plates check, assorted MOLLE equipment check, ACUs and boots check, arctic gear check.

Murfreesboro, here we come. Five hundred mile trip and we overnighted just past St. Louis near the junction of I-57 and I-54 on the outskirts of Mt. Vernon. Barrett had good security but nothing a cutting torch couldn't defeat. I was very careful selecting the rifles, getting 3 M82A1M with monopod and Schmidt and Bender Scopes equipped with the BORS, three model 99s in .416 with the same scopes, three soft mounts for the M82s, six REC 7s and 2 98 Bravos with the same scopes. For those rifles that used magazines, I got 20 per for the large calibers and 30 per for the REC 7, due to the inexpensive pricing plus drag bags for every rifle and all the ammo we could find. Once loaded up, we got into the truck to take our leave.

At that moment, things went to Hell in a hand basket. While we were inside making our selections, some local survivors, probably former Barrett employees, gathered and blocked our primary and secondary means of egress. They all appeared to be armed with Barrett REC 7s. I slammed on the brakes the moment I saw them, thought about it for a split second and turned toward the backup exit.

No joy, they had us cold. I stopped, left the truck idling and waited for one of them to approach the truck. Finally, one did, motioning for me to lower the window.

"What were you doing in the Barrett factory?"

"Looting."

"You admit it?"

"I would have called it salvaging or scavenging in other circumstances; you can call it what you want."

"We've done a little ourselves."

"So I see. Now what?"

“The Barrett’s all died in the pandemic. The few families that did survive in the area think of the factory as a community asset. We sell the weapons to get gold and silver to buy foods we can’t produce ourselves.”

“What’s the stuff worth?”

“Have any gold or silver?”

“A little (a lie, made one other stop in Springfield, Joplin, Tulsa and Kansas City).”

“You give us that little gold and silver and you can leave. Otherwise...”

“I only have 12 ounces each of gold and silver.”

“Just the right amount.”

I removed the 12 gold Eagles from my left shirt pocket and the 12 silver Eagles from my right shirt pocket, handing them to the man.

“Just right, it’s time for you to be on your way. Leave the woman, if you want.”

“I don’t think so, she my wife.”

“Just a suggestion. Be on your way?”

o

“That was humiliating.”

“Yes, I’m sure it was. I’m equally sure that we’ve just been robbed.”

“I didn’t know we had any gold or silver.”

“We didn’t before that generator hunting trip and the trip to Kansas City.”

“That’s why you stopped at that one store!”

“Found a listing in the Yellow Pages while I was looking for the addresses for the other places. I took in the cutting torch, remember?”

“I wondered about that. You didn’t seem to be carrying anything when you came out and ignored me when I asked what it was about. So, how much do we have left?”

“A lot more than I gave that guy; a whole lot more. One dealer has bags of pre-65 silver coins, \$500 face value per bag. Didn’t get much gold there. The next had gold Eagles in 4 denominations and silver Eagles. The third had 4 denominations of Krugerrands and

gold Eagles plus silver Eagles. The guy in KC only had what I gave that guy back there.”

“We’re rich!”

“Speak for yourself; I’m rich because I have you as my wife.”

“Flattery will get you anything you want.”

“I figured that; so would beating you.”

“Daddy would kill you.”

“No doubt; and, my father would be in line to finish what he started if he got tired. You truly are a beautiful woman Jan and I’m not saying that because you’re the only one around. There was that blonde whore at that other farm and she can’t hold a candle to you.”

## Pandemic – Chapter 9

“What blonde whore?”

“Remember when we tracked down the coal thieves?”

“Yes, so...?”

“Some were married, some single. They had this young blonde with a chest out to there that the leader described as having all of her brains in her chest. She met the needs of the single men. She could have been pretty, but wasn't. Rather forward actually.”

“You never mentioned her.”

“Nothing to mention, ask your Dad.”

“So how much gold and silver do we have?”

“A lot, but I never had a chance to count it. The old silver coins I counted the bags. There's about 715 ounces of silver content per \$1,000 face value. We have 8 bags of \$500 face value or \$4,000 face value, about 2,860 ounces plus the silver bullion coins. We'll have to sit down when we have time and count it.”

“What use is it?”

“I used gold on that trip way back when I went to Jefferson City to buy things we needed. I just bought our way out of trouble back there. I'd like to take a semi back to KC and do a better job of emptying those Costco stores and any Sam's Club we find. Then, we can call it quits and stay home.”

“And you want me to go with you to cover your back?”

“I really do. By the time we've got that done, the tanks should be installed and the three of us can start hauling the diesel fuel from Montrose.”

“How much storage will we have?”

“280,000 gallons plus the two double tankers for a total of 316,000 gallons.”

“Ok, one last trip. I so miss our baby.”

“I do too; believe me when I say that.”

“We can afford to spend a few days at home...”

“No, let's get it done.”

o

“Did you get everything on the list?”

“Yes, and more. Had to pay for some of it in Tennessee, but we’re ready for war. I want to make one more trip to Kansas City with Jan to cover my back. Get things we can use from Costco and Sam’s Clubs. Maybe go into Kansas City proper and check out a couple of stores. How’s it going with the tanks?”

“We’ve got ours and Paul’s buried, hooked up and are running on generator power. We’re getting close to having yours finished too. Generator is hooked up, tanks aren’t done. Put 18,000 gallons in our tank and Paul’s. Have two full double tankers for yours. It will just be a few more days. While you’re at it, check out a Sears’s warehouse for 3 25ft<sup>3</sup> chest freezers and 3 new refrigerators. Get a mess of those high efficiency light bulbs too.”

Jan came out of the house with Cheryl clutching her tight. I held her while Jan got in the cab and handed Cheryl up. We went home and Jan and Cheryl went into the house. I pulled over to the machine shed and began unloading the ammo and ordnance. The weapons went into the house, down in the basement for now and would be divided up and our portion locked in the gun safe when we returned from Kansas City.

I wanted a German Shepherd puppy to replace Ruff but didn’t see how that was possible. The division of the tanks between the three locations was 2 30s and 1 40 at Dad’s and Paul’s. Jan and I got 2 40s and would store the two tankers. Wouldn’t have minded having a 20 to even things out at 100 per.

When I finished, I washed up and spent some quality time with Cheryl. At her age it is debatable what quality time really means. Jan put together a casserole for supper and I put Cheryl down for her nap. By now, my ear was mostly healed up and ugly looking. I was bone tired and looking forward to dinner, a hot shower and bed. I think Jan was every bit as tired as I was. Have to put off the trip to KC a day or two to rest up.

Jan showered first after Cheryl was attended to. By the time I got out of the shower, she was sound asleep. I think I was asleep by the time my head hit my pillow. Cheryl had been sleeping the night thru since she was 5 weeks old. She woke Jan wanting changed and fed around 6 and Jan let me sleep. I got up, took care of business, shaved and came down for breakfast around 8:30.

“Get your sleep out?”

“I’m as tired as I was when I went to bed.”

“Take a nap this afternoon and I’ll join you.”

“Were you planning on getting any sleep?”

“Some.”

Before we took our nap, we took Cheryl over to Shirley and told her we were leaving early in the morning. We went home, got our nap, got some sleep and finished off the leftover casserole. I swapped the U Haul for a semi and two 53' box trailers and filled the semi's tanks. Using a dolly to hook the second trailer to the first gave us twice the storage as a single unit but made for an awkward set up, in the area of 120' long.

I planned to drop the trailers and do the Kansas City precious metals dealers first and then hook up to and load one trailer at a time, first at a Sear's warehouse. As it turned out, we did well in Kansas City, far better than I expected, and by the time we had everything we wanted from Costco, had one trailer full and a good start on the second. We finished those off at Sam's Clubs the next morning and headed home, pleased with the trip. I thought I'd seen a fuel tank on a trailer on the way up and stopped to check it out on the way down.

I was right and the tank, fiberglass, was 4 paces wide and about 18 paces long. When we got back, I got the brochure and looked it up; 25,000 gallons. I dropped the box trailers, filled the tractor's tanks and took off after telling Dad and Paul I found a 25,000 gallon tank on the way home. They immediately stopped filling in the hole and began to excavate a proper sized space to the new tank.

I was back in 5 hours and the hole was ready. They lifted the tank off the trailer and set it in the foot of sand on the bottom of the hole. The medications we got at Costco were in the sleeping compartment of the truck and I took those into the house. They'd already filled the first tank with 36,000 gallons and we had electric lights.

Once the tanks were installed, we added PRI-D to the tankers, filled them at Montrose and emptied them at home until all the tanks were full and both trailers full and parked. Over the several days that followed, we divided up the food from the Kansas City trip, the meds and the refrigerators and freezers. Finally, the firearms and ordnance were divided up and I put ours in my gun safe after cleaning and prepping them.

Those cotton diapers were showing their age and with Jan expecting again, we'd need new ones and an automatic washer and dryer would be nice since we had electricity. This I could do alone and took the U Haul truck. I first hit the store in Sedalia and then headed to Jefferson City. The guys still manned a roadblock, but I was a familiar face and waived through when I told them I was headed to the Capital Mall to get diapers from Penny's. I may have overlooked telling them about getting a washer and propane dryer.

That's another thing, maybe Sedalia was out of propane, but other places weren't and I found both Ferrellgas and AmeriGas locations here and there. Rather more of the AmeriGas than Ferrellgas, but still.... Even found a semi-trailer for propane marked



11,600 gallons. Looked new, circa 2008 would be my guess. Big, over the road unit, forty-some feet long. Rated 260psi.

When I got back, we installed the washer and dryer and Jan and Cheryl drove me to get the tanker. She waited this time until I was loaded and heading home. We'd picked up a pair of car seats in Sedalia. Might not be any traffic on the road but a car seat was still a good idea, accidents can happen. Didn't seem likely, new truck with new tires, but still...

That truck had provisions for a hitch front and back and I had a ball and pintle hitch I could use on either end. I also had a 12K Warn winch that would work on either end. I added a light bar on top of the Megacab for more light and a cross bed fuel tank holding an additional 109 gallons (Dodge pickup). The pickup came with a primary and secondary tank. Carried the chain saw, an axe, shovel, high lift jack, big old pry bar I think they call a railroad bar, and other tools, just in case. I didn't trust tires this old and carried 4 spares on the roof rack.

Not having experienced a Supervolcano or WW III, we didn't have to deal with unseasonable cold. However, highways require maintenance if they're to continue to be useful. As it was, they were in bad shape and getting worse. Weeds protruded through cracks, expanding the concrete or asphalt creating uneven roads. We were coming up on another growing season and any further shopping would be put off until after harvest.

This year I learned how to use the various farm implements, I was going to stick to full till for the moment. Did the garden first and started on the fields while Jan planted the garden. I had pulled all of the fences except the pasture fence for ease of plowing, disking, dragging and planting. It also applied to cultivating, and I had to cultivate three times.

In the between times, I helped pick and can the garden produce. The ice house had been filled over the previous winter by freezing large pans of water and moving the blocks into the Ice house. We all three now did that. Because Jan and I had been gone so often, Dad or Paul would put the block away and start another.

We took our first real break on Independence Day. Ice came in handy for making ice cream. Had fresh strawberries to go with the ice cream and watermelon for later in the evening. No fireworks since the pandemic and we didn't give it a second thought. It was a typical summer picnic, fried chicken, pork ribs, potato salad, macaroni salad, coleslaw, ice cream with strawberries and watermelon; plus, no uninvited guests except for the flies.

We even took time during the afternoon for a horse ride around our farm. Corn was waist high, everything, including weeds, seemed to be growing fine. Have to start cultivating again tomorrow. Mom and Jan's Mom teamed with Jan and 6 days a week they picked and canned. Each garden got picked through twice a week. Jan told me when we were out this winter to look for more lids. I made a note.

I was out cultivating the next day when the radio broke squelch. I shut down so I could hear the radio. It was Paul and there were uninvited guests at their house. The 3 women were working on Mom's garden that day and I had my pistol in my shoulder holster, my Colt on my hip plus my Super Match in a fender mounted scabbard. I replied, "I'm on my way," grabbed the rifle and magazine bag and started running toward Paul's. Dad came along in his new Dodge pickup and we rode the rest of the way, stopping short when we saw the attackers.

"Well, you have the best rifle, get set up and have at it, Don."

I lay down, extended the Harris bipod's legs and looked through the Carl Zeiss scope. They were 730 meters, call it 800 yards. My ammo was the M118LR. I cranked in the elevation based on what the range finding scope said and checked the wind. It was in our face, out of the west, no adjustment required. The rifle let out a loud pop with the first shot that took down the guy closest to Paul. I re-sighted picking the next nearest, took a breath, let it out half way and the rifle popped again.

Not soundless, they never are, but the Surefire FA762S was almost always on the rifle and I hadn't even thought about it when I first fired. It was obvious that someone was shooting at them, they were falling from the front to the back and not how Alvin York did it. But the sun was in their eyes and the wind in our face the best of both worlds. Paul was getting his licks in too, now that they were under a cross fire. Eventually, the survivors ran, back to the west, the direction they had come from.

Dad and I got in the Dodge and drove up to join Paul.

"Was that you with the Super Match?"

"Yes sir, using that military sniper ammo and my Surefire. Almost to the end of the effective range of my rifle, I guess I got lucky."

"Not hardly, check the bodies."

"So, I hit them where I was aiming."

"Do you always do headshots?"

"If I'm not sure about body armor, sure."

"The ones with chest wounds, I killed. I'll take their guns. You take the guns from the head shots."

"Wow, PTR-91s."

"Not hardly, G-3s!"

“Select fire?”

“Yep. Tell him what he has Bart.”

“The G3A3 (A4) is a selective-fire automatic weapon that employs a roller-delay blow-back operating system. The two-piece bolt assembly consists of a breech (bolt head) and bolt carrier. The bolt is held in battery by two sliding cylindrical rollers that engage locking recesses in the barrel extension. The breech is opened when both rollers are compressed inward against camming surfaces driven by the rearward pressure of the expanding gases upon the bolt head. As the rollers move inward, recoil energy is transferred to the locking piece and bolt carrier which begin to withdraw while the bolt head slowly moves rearward in relation to the bolt carrier. As the bolt carrier clears the rollers, pressure in the bore drops to a safe level, the bolt head is caught by the bolt carrier and moves to the rear as one unit, continuing the operating cycle. The bolt also features an anti-bounce mechanism that prevents the bolt from bouncing off the barrel's breech surface. The spring-powered claw extractor is also contained inside the bolt while the lever ejector is located inside the trigger housing (actuated by the recoiling bolt). These are A3s, the A4s have the folding buttstock.”

“Look like the PTR-91.”

“The follow on to the G-3 was the HK41 semi-auto, imported here as the HK91 for some durned fool reason. Since Daddy Bush urged the import ban, you can't import nuttin. I figure those are worth up to ten grand apiece if the bores are good and they don't need any replacement parts. Any full autos you see in this country were probably conversions.”

“But, are they controllable?”

“Better than the M14E2, not as good as the M16. BM-59 was probably the best.”

“I think I'll clean them up and put them in the gun safe to save for the kids.”

“What was the shooting all about?”

“Rifle collecting.”

“Say what?”

“I got to keep the weapons from the three guys I killed who were attacking your Dad.”

“What did you get?”

Three H&K G3A3 rifles, three Beretta 92FS and assorted knives. Thought I'd put them up for the kids. Have to get them an in between gun, maybe a Mini-14 or a Bushmaster semi-auto.”

“I hope you wait until she’s out of diapers!”

“I was thinking in the range of 10 to learn a handle a .22, 12 to move to a .223 and a 20 gauge. After that, wait and see.”

“Men!”

“What did I say?”

She didn’t answer so I went back to cultivating. Thought for a minute or two that I might end up on the couch; decided it was a combination of things, someone shooting at her Dad coupled with me talking about arming the children. Well I was, just not immediately. Had three rifles, now had a goal, three kids or bust.

One thing for sure was; we had too many guns. A person might be able to shoot two pistols/revolvers at once, but when it came to a long arm, one was pretty much the limit be it rifle or shotgun. On the other hand, the gun safe wasn’t full, yet. And, 9½ years is a long time.

Took three days to do the cultivating and that was probably the last time, the crops were too high/big. So, I helped all I could with the gardening. Had a composting pile going for the horse, cow and pig manure, too. Summer passed into fall and the gardening fell off. It was time to harvest and we helped each other, one in the field, one at the barn or silo and one in between. In no time at all, we were a well-oiled machine with the limiting factor being the harvester in the field.

Got the harvest done, onions out and drying, potatoes dug and curing. Rototilled the garden rather than plowing. That included some of the composting mix. Spread the remainder on the fields, but ran out of compost before I ran out of fields. Thought about it some more and decided to rototill the fields. Only had 115 acres to do, should be done by early October.

I got done before Thanksgiving and didn’t get a turkey so they decided on standing rib roast. Once we had electricity, they’d hauled a meat cutting saw, tenderizer, meat grinder and slicer out to my machine shed and set up a small butchering operation.

This baby was kicking a lot more than Cheryl did and everyone was predicting a son. Had me convinced. Except, the plumbing was wrong, Tomboy, maybe, but definitely female. Every bit as cute as Cheryl, but I do believe she had a gleam in her eye imagining all the mischief she was going to cause. Fifteen months apart was about right as far as Jan was concerned and she said she wanted a son too.

Predicting the sex of a child without an ultrasound was just a bunch of voodoo magic, you had a 50-50 chance. We named our second child, our ‘son’, Susan Marie. So, we had Cheryl Lynn, 15 months, and Susan Marie, newborn and six months to wait before

the announcement. I can tell one thing, from the gitgo, the difference in personalities was obvious.

## Pandemic – Chapter 10

Everyone commented on the subject. They had to get it out of their systems before Cheryl was old enough to understand. Only difference this time was six months took seven months. Close enough for government work, right?

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas we went through the timber and cut selected trees and used a team to pull the logs back to the homesteads. One man on the chain-saw, one running the splitter and the third stacking the wood and we were done well before Christmas. Even had time to get 2 dump truck loads of coal each. Topped off the diesel tanks and rigged a siphon pump to pump gasoline out of a service station tank so everyone had a full load of everything and spares.

I don't know where Paul came up with the PRI-G and PRI-D, he never said and I never asked, but I believe he had a lifetime supply. You mix one gallon of PRI with 2,000 gallons of product. The drums held 55 gallons, enough for 110,000 gallons. I'd told Dad Paul had several drums. 3 drums of PRI-G and 12 drums of PRI-D as it later turned out. Enough to treat 1,320,000 gallons of diesel and 330,000 gallons of gasoline. And our generators burn about 8,766 gallons a year on average. Oh, times three, one on each farm. Montrose alone had enough diesel fuel for about 13.3 years.

Montrose got their fuel from somewhere and perhaps a check around the plant would be revealing. Plus there were truck stops all over the country holding millions of gallons of diesel and gasoline, probably some propane and kerosene too. When Paul and Dad installed the tanks, some of the plumbing had to be cobbled together because the pumps were 3 phase and we had single phase generators. They substituted single phase pumps but need a portable generator to get the pumps to pump so the generator had fuel to run. Surely Cummins/Onan had taken that into consideration.

On the home front, that brief excursion into the future concerning the children and fire-arms hung like Poe's pendulum over his head, swinging, moving ever closer. Jan hadn't brought it up after that, but he sensed, rather than knew, the issue wasn't resolved, just dormant. The world was a hard place now and as the infrastructure collapsed, finding useable items became more difficult. He did get the Mini-14s, 4 of them, a similar number of .22 pistols and 4 20-gauge pumps

Winter is a strange thing on the farm, especially a farm with limited livestock. In the older times, his father sometimes drove to town just to sit in with the coffee klatch listening to the weather estimates, what everyone planned to plant and other farm news. That ended the moment the CDC announced the Pandemic, and had school not been shut down, Don was sure his Dad would have kept him home anyway. Bart couldn't get a prescription for Relenza and fell back to plan B, isolation.

Don now had the same problem, little to do except decide on what to plant where. He used a standard crop rotation scheme, following nitrogen fixing crops with nitrogen depleting crops. The compost had gone on the corn field for the most part. For want of

something better to he went back to the timber and made a second pass through, selecting additional trees to cut. It was only 4 trees, but they were large and contained a lot of finished firewood.

He decided to drop them then and there since he had his chainsaw. The first three fell exactly where intended and he began by cutting the wedge in the final tree. His cut stopped just short of the rotted core. Part way into the cut, the saw plowed into the tree when it hit the hollow center. He let loose of the saw and ran, not knowing where he tree would fall.

One branch caught him across the back, slamming him to the ground and knocking out his wind. Once he could breathe again, Don took stock of his situation. He was stuck, period. He wasn't hurt, just stuck. Jan knew where he was and when he wasn't back by chore time, his Dad and Paul would come looking. As soon as they cut the offending branch from the tree, he'd be free. However, he began to notice a wet spot on his shirt almost out of reach on his back.

He finally was able to reach the spot and his hand came back covered with blood. Well, so much for not being hurt. So, he waited, and waited, and waited some more. Finally, he heard his father voice, "Don, where are you?"

"Over here," he croaked.

"Hurt?"

"Bleeding, can't tell. If you can cut this limb off, I'll be free and you can look."

"I've got his saw," Paul called. "Tree had a rotten core. You got lucky Don."

"Oh, is that what they call it? I felt the saw slip, dropped it and ran for it. Now, would one of you please cut this limb?"

"Have to figure something, it's resting on the ground just past where you are, can't cut it there."

"I didn't figure on cutting it there, I figured at the trunk."

"Bart, what do you think?"

"His decision. Might see something we can't."

"Ok, cross your fingers."

The tree dropped clean the rest of the way to the ground. They made a second cut close by where I lay and lifted the two pieces off me.

“Turn around, let me check. Well crap, you tore loose a large flap of skin. Gonna need stitches. You mother is going to have to sew you up. Didn't I teach you better than to go tree cutting alone?”

“Might have, can't remember. Sure going to catch hell from Jan.”

“You should.”

“There's more to that story. Let me explain. Remember the recent shootout where I got the 3 G3A3? I explained what happened and told Jan I was putting the rifles up for our children, the HKs and the Berettas. To say she didn't think much of the idea would be a gross understatement. She hasn't said anything else, but there some kind of undercurrent.”

“She's like women from time immemorial. Remember the song by Waylon and Willie?”

“Not really.”

“I'm not much of a singer, but here goes:

*Cowboys ain't easy to love and they're harder to hold.  
They'd rather give you a song than diamonds or gold.  
Lonestar belt buckles and old faded levis,  
And each night begins a new day.  
If you don't understand him, an' he don't die young,  
He'll prob'ly just ride away.*

*Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys.  
Don't let 'em pick guitars or drive them old trucks.  
Let 'em be doctors and lawyers and such.  
Mamas don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys.  
'Cos they'll never stay home and they're always alone.  
Even with someone they love.*

*Cowboys like smokey old pool rooms and clear mountain mornings,  
Little warm puppies and children and girls of the night.  
Them that don't know him won't like him and them that do,  
Sometimes won't know how to take him.  
He ain't wrong, he's just different but his pride won't let him,  
Do things to make you think he's right.*

*Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys.  
Don't let 'em pick guitars or drive them old trucks.  
Let 'em be doctors and lawyers and such.  
Mamas don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys.  
'Cos they'll never stay home and they're always alone.*



*Even with someone they love.*

“So, how does that apply?”

“Substitute soldiers for cowboys.”

“I had no intention of turning them into soldiers.”

“Not directly, but you were planning on them to defend themselves and the others, right?”

“Of course.”

“And that would make them...”

“Don’t know what you’re looking for.”

“Paramilitary”

“I started teaching Janice right after the pandemic started.”

“I did the same with you Don. I know Mary wasn’t happy about it, can’t speak for Shirley.”

“Same way Bart.”

“Bottom line, there’s no rush, she’ll get used to the idea. Now, let’s go get you sewn back together. Bart and I will pull the logs up and drop them.”

“How did you manage to do this?”

“I was cutting down a tree and the center was rotted out. I was just lucky that I didn’t get hurt more than this.”

“Here, let me get a mirror and you can see what you did to your back.”

“Take that into the bathroom with your back to the mirror and see what you think.”

“Bigger than I thought, do you have enough sutures?”

“I don’t have any left, I’ll use white thread. Got nothing for the pain, grit your teeth.”

It took a lot of sutures and the last one hurt just as bad as the first. Mom topped the tear with neosporin cream with pain relief, covered it with a gauze pad and taped it in place. Dad gave me a ride home.

“Am I going to have to lock you in a closet? When you didn’t show up when expected, I called for help.”

“Thank you. I was pinned and knew that when I was overdue, you get Dad and Paul to find me.”

“How did it happen?”

“A big old tree with a rotten core. I made the wedge cut just fine. When I moved to the backside to bring it down, I was only part way in when the saw chain hit the core and cut right through. I let go of the saw and ran but a limb pinned me down.”

“I looked at that tree after they drug them up. There’s no way you could have known. That why timber harvesting is usually done by two or more people.”

“It’s a lesson I won’t forget anytime soon.”

“Sorry about being difficult that past few weeks; I kept thinking of a song I heard once.”

“*Mama don’t let your babies grow up to be cowboys?*”

“No, the other one, the coke song:

*I'd like to teach the world to sing  
In perfect harmony  
I'd like to hold it in my arms and keep it company  
I'd like to see the world for once  
All standing hand in hand  
And hear them echo through the hills "Ah, peace throughout the land"*

“As long as there are people out there that would rather steal than work for what they need, we’re going to be forced to defend ourselves, like it or not. Overall, we’ve had less than one attack per year. Not perfect by any means, but tolerable. Eventually we’ll eliminate the bad elements and might end up *with peace throughout the land.*”

“We’re still going to have to scavenge aren’t we?”

“To a lesser extent. Between what is here and what is stored at Montrose, we have enough diesel fuel for over 13 years. Plus enough coal for several lifetimes. We haven’t even begun to salvage fuel from truck stop tanks and some of them have as much as a million gallons of diesel plus gas, kerosene and propane. That big tanker I picked up holds 11,600 gallons of propane and it’s full as you saw plus more at the same location.”

## Pandemic – Chapter 11

“No more guns, right?”

“I didn’t say that. Each of our children needs to learn proper firearms handling just as you and I did. Depending on the child, I’d start them around age 10, move up a notch when they’re around 12 and have them fully trained and equipped by age 18, give or take. Those few firearms we don’t have in quantity will have to be located and available when needed. We’re only talking self-defense here, not creating a paramilitary force. Our parents aren’t growing any younger and before it’s all said and done, we’ll need to attract additional families to maintain the status quo.”

“I suppose so, but that doesn’t mean I like it.”

“It would be nice to have our own Cavalry unit. We have a good start on getting mounts. The attack on your Dad just reinforces that we’re not alone in the world and that not all of the survivors are good guys.”

It would take a dozen years to build a good herd of horses. We’d want mostly geldings for a cavalry unit around 5-7 years old. Jan and I were the only couple still adding children to the mix, additional families with children and hopefully having more would be needed. I thought about the land on the other side of the road. No river there, good land with a few stands of timber some wild and one or two previously maintained as coppicing woodlots.

Any buildings had long since been removed, when I don’t know. No fencing, Dad said a corporation owned the land and consolidated several homesteads into a single, large farming area. Many activities were hired done, herbicides, pesticides, anhydrous and so forth used to maximize yield and eliminate work. Harvesters came in on cue and harvested everything and delivered the grain to the elevator. A local farmer had done the fall plowing, spring disking and dragging and the cycle repeated itself. They used GM seed to match the chemicals.

“Think we could develop the land on the other side of the road?”

“What for? We have enough land to farm.”

“I was trying to think ahead. You two aren’t getting any younger and neither are Paul and Shirley. Eventually to remain safe in our location, we’ll have to find other families with growing children and having more. Even if we have enough kids for a baseball team, they’ll range in age from infants to teens.”

“Well, that makes sense. Going to be hard to find survivors you can trust and that want to move from where they are to here. Especially since the only thing over there are the wells; no septic systems, no housing, mostly no nothing.”

“I thought about that. I thought maybe putting in septic systems, installing doublewide mobile homes, putting in storm shelters and machine sheds to begin with. Furnishing the homes would be no problem, free furniture from the store. Collect some of those farm tanks I emptied and move them there.”

“If you intended to heat with coal, you’d have to put in basements.”

“Heat with propane; there’re tanks of propane everywhere, it just has to be collected. Put in Franklin stoves, the newer more efficient designs. And no, I don’t have an answer for everything.”

“Nonetheless, you’ve thought it out. It’s going to be a lot of work.”

“Unless something changes with the winters, we could have a one place added each winter until we run out of equipment and supplies.”

“We might even increase the pace once we had a couple of places built and occupied. Have you talked to Paul?”

“He’s next.”

“Have you talked to Jan?”

“She was first.”

“You’ve learned.”

“Yes, sometimes the hard way. Do you think we can figure out how to assemble a doublewide mobile home?”

“Might be tricky. Singlewides might be better. Some of them are 16’ wide by 80’ long. They could be towed in and set in place. We could get 3 bedroom models, install a dual fuel wood/coal stove of some kind and only use the propane for the stove, hot water and dryer. Use the propane furnace only as a backup unit.”

“Sounds good Dad; I’ll mention it to Paul.”

That was my next stop, Paul’s. However, I stopped by home to pick up Jan, Cheryl and Susan so Grandma Shirley could spoil them. Paul and I discussed the idea of both doublewide and singlewide mobile homes. He, like Dad, thought assembling a doublewide was probably not worth the effort. It would be enough trouble just finding the 16’x80’ singlewides.

Not really, I knew from visiting with a guy that time I made a trip to Jefferson City that a company named Manufactured Housing Enterprises on state route 6 in Byran, Ohio made the 16’x80’ homes and should have a few on their lot. Careful perusal of a map

revealed that Byran was almost due east from South Bend, a one way trip of about 600 miles.

One of those homes would weight too much to be towed by a pickup; it would require a large truck, probably a semi-tractor with the appropriate type of hitch. I learned that “Coupling mechanism. The coupling mechanism (which is usually of the socket type) shall be securely fastened to the drawbar in such a manner as to assure safe and effective transfer of the maximum loads, including dynamic loads, between the manufactured home structure and the hitch-assembly of the towing vehicle. The coupling shall be equipped with a manually operated mechanism so adapted as to prevent disengagement of the unit while in operation. The coupling shall be so designed that it can be disconnected regardless of the angle of the manufactured home to the towing vehicle. With the manufactured home parked on level ground, the center of the socket of the coupler shall not be less than 20 inches nor more than 26 inches from ground level.” (Federal law)

So we had to find a truck designed to tow a mobile home and it had to have the correct size tow ball, probably 2½”, SAE class V. I say probably because we wouldn’t know for certain until we got to Byran. I eventually found three rigs used to tow mobile homes and smaller trailers. They had an assortment of the ball couplings and we had the time before spring field work, so off the 4 of us went. Jan was number 4 and would lead the way back in the pickup which was carrying drums of extra diesel.

She drove both ways and I navigated using the road atlas we had. Byran wasn’t a huge town and we more than happened on it than found it, due to a road sign with an arrow and the mileage. Unsure of way lay ahead of us, trouble or not, we were well prepared. When we got to the factory, there were display models, complete with furniture. We refueled the tractors and hooked up. We left the following morning and drove straight through, stopping only once to top off the tanks and a few times to empty ours.

The return trip took 14 hours and would have been much longer had there been any traffic on the road. It was a relief to get home and Jan nearly drowned Susan with the quantity of milk she had. The front of her shirt was wet and I knew she must have been uncomfortable and probably ‘leaked’. She planned on nursing Susan for about 6 months, like she had Cheryl. She had pumped her milk and had accumulated enough for two full days for Shirley to take care of Susan. Mom had taken Cheryl and we’d only been gone the day up and the following day back.

“No more trips please while I’m nursing.”

“We could have taken her with us, but I thought it might be too risky and introduce the variable in the equation that caused us to take less than ideal responses.”

“I understand, Don, really I do. But, it wasn’t you being forced to express the milk.”

“Express it? Where did it go?”

“I used a breast pump; some ran down my chest and was mostly soaked up by a towel on my lap; and all that was going on while I was driving.”

“You didn’t say anything.”

“It was rather personal, wouldn’t you agree?”

“I guess so. Ok, no more trips while you’re nursing.”

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We had the ground graded, the three septic systems in and three wells working in no time. We leveled the three homes, each one on a 160 acre farm. Next came pairs of 1,100 gallon propane tanks, hooked up and filled. After that, we found Harman TLC 2000 Wood/Coal Stoves, a coal stove which can be converted to a fireplace stove and burn wood, plus serve as a cooking grill. In addition, the TLC 2000 required no electricity, guaranteeing its performance through a power loss. And with the industry’s largest glass door for easy viewing and air wash glass-cleaning system and an optional air grill, the TLC 2000 is the only stove you’ll ever need (they claimed). They were the perfect price, costing only the diesel fuel to haul them home. We brought all 9 we found however, some were larger models putting out more heat.

The final step was to take the three extra generators and install them along with a small diesel tank connected directly to a tanker. The small tank held about a 2 day supply of diesel, allowing replacement of an empty tanker with a full one. However, that threw a monkey wrench in the works and I got out the list of Cummins Distributors and went looking for more of the QD 12.5s. Six this time so everyone had two, the primary and the secondary. I went to Iowa, Illinois and Arkansas and got six, a dozen more rebuild kits plus a lot of oil and filters. Not a lifetime supply, but closer.

The singlewides were empty, just waiting for occupants. We discussed the other group, the one with the blonde, and decided against asking any of them to move to our location. We didn’t see much of them because they limited their coal hauling to T-Th-Sa and when we needed more, we went M-W-F. We didn’t make a lot of trips to Montrose either, we had a minimum of 100k gallons of diesel for each of us and were only using about 8,800gpy or a bit over a tanker load per year. When we counted in what the transportation and tractors used, it was about 27,000 gallons, one dual tanker and a single. We found additional 18,000 duals and parked one tanker at each of the mobile homes, keeping the others at our farms.

Seven months after Susan was born, Jan was pregnant again. As her pregnancy progressed, we decided we couldn’t tell what the baby was until it joined us. It was more active than Cheryl and less active than Susan. Jan had stopped nursing at six months, voluntarily. Cheryl was now getting around fairly well at her age and into everything. I’d been shopping around when I’d had time to locate the additional firearms I’d mentioned

for the kids, the .22s, .223s, 20-gauges and 12-gauge pumps. Marlin rifles if I could find them and any brand of 6-gun as long as it was a .45 Colt caliber.

We had a lot of hides set aside and I got a book from the library and tackled tanning to get leather for rifle scabbards. I'd cleaned several hides and soaked them in wood ash and water to remove the hair. The resulting hide was scraped smooth, salted and stretched into rawhide and then stored in the basement still on the stretching frame. Meanwhile, when I had time, I collected oak bark. When I had enough, I made up a solution of oak bark and water to vegetable tan the hides. When they were done, I allowed them to dry some before I began to work the hides ending up with a heavy supple leather.

On the trip to hunt for firearms, I'd come upon a man driving a newer John Deere tractor. Rather than pass him, I fell into trail. A few miles later, he stopped the tractor and got down, pistol strapped to his waist, rifle held at low ready.

"Are you following me?"

"Sure am. We don't see many people. I'm Don Masterson from near Sedalia."

"What did you want?"

"We each have a farm. There're three families, each with a quarter section. We moved in nice 3 bedroom singlewide mobile homes, leveled, plumbed with water and septic, propane and a coal/wood burning stove. They came furnished. What we're looking for is 3 families to move there and take up residence. I won't say there aren't others in the area, but the other group we know of is a strange lot. It's probably only about 75 miles from here. Good land with  $\frac{1}{4}$  of it in timber."

"I know what you mean about finding more families. Marion and I have 3 sons, all young. We've talked some about trying to find a group to join, but, like you said, we don't see many people."

"It's just the five of you and no more?"

"No more. If there were, we wouldn't be considering a move. Might be interested, have to talk to Marion. Oh, sorry, excuse my manners, Joshua Morgan. Care to give me directions and an amateur frequency? We'll let you know if we were coming."

## Pandemic – Chapter 12

“Hang on, I’ll get a legal pad and write it down for you. Now, here’s a frequency on 40 meters we’ll monitor at 7pm, our time. Best way to get to our property is...can you read this ok?”

”Yes, glad you printed. We’ve done some salvaging; don’t know if we could make the move in one trip.”

“We have tractor trailer rigs...plenty of diesel, a little less gasoline.”

“My new Megacab has a diesel engine and an 8’ bed with a topper. Got a big trailer, too. Local gun dealer didn’t have that good of a vault, if you know what I mean.”

“I was actually out trying to run down firearms for our kids.”

“Military or cowboy?”

“Some of each, here’s my list.”

“Get any of them yet?”

“The single shot 20-gauges, the Mini-14s and Ruger 10/22s. Still need the 12-gauge pumps and the cowboy guns.”

“Mossberg shotguns ok?”

“Ghost ring sights?”

“Definitely. Have 4 we can spare. The Marlins came from another store, 1894s in .45 Colt and 1895s in .45-70. The revolvers are Ruger Vaqueros in .45 Colt, 5½” barrels.”

“Willing to sell them?”

“How about they’re our buy in if we decide to move? Otherwise, sure, I sell them; gold or silver if you have it, otherwise food.”

“Got a little. Let us know; we’ll bring a semi.”

“Any chance you could bring a couple of extra tractors? Located some loaded tankers; one is a split load of gas and diesel and the other is all diesel. I’ve got 24,000 gallons of diesel and 8,000 gallons of gasoline and no way to move it.”

“Stabilized?”

“Yeah, PRI-D and PRI-G, good stuff.”



I stopped in Jefferson City as I continued on the way home, looking for ammo. I ended up with full power reloads, in .45-70 and .45 Colt. The guy claimed it was once used brass and I tended to believe him. Let me test fire one round of each, good stuff. I now had, or had a line on, the firearms for the kids. I was delayed in Jefferson City and got home late.

“Your Mom called on the radio. Do you know someone named Josh Morgan?”

“I met him on the trip. He’s a farmer, married, with 3 small boys. I talked to him about taking one of those farms.”

“You’d better run over to your parents and fill them in. Mom and Dad are there too, so you won’t need to do it twice.”

“Want to go?”

“I just got the two down and sleeping. I’m tired, I was going shower and go to bed.”

“Ok, I’ll go fill them in and be back ASAP.”

I filled the four of them in on what I’d learned from visiting with Joshua including the fact that he had 32,000 gallons of fuel and a working tractor. He had been armed with a M1911A1 and a Garand rifle, .308 he said, from Springfield Armory. My impression of him was he was close to my age and honest. He didn’t need to tell me nearly as much as he had and must have felt he could trust me. They’d told him I hadn’t arrived home yet and asked him to call back the following evening at 7.

Janice was sleeping when I got home and I showered, checked on the kids and crawled into bed. I was up at 6 and down for breakfast at 6:30. I fed Cheryl while Jan nursed Susan and changed diapers while Jan fixed pancakes and sausage. There weren’t many chores to do, milk 4 cows, feed the hogs, chickens and horses plus gather the eggs. Most of the rest of the day was spent trying to produce Colby cheese. I seemed to be having mixed results.

That evening, we were all gathered at Dad’s when Josh called. They’d talked it over and wanted to move. Probably wouldn’t need a box trailer, but a lowboy would make moving the equipment easier. They could haul their possessions, but needed two tractors to pull the tankers. They’d already started packing and would be ready to go in two days. Mom agreed to drive the pickup back so Jan could tend to the girls. We decided to skirt Jefferson City on the south side on the way back, going through Wardsville on route M and then route B.

We arrived about 9am and loaded the equipment on the lowboy while they finished loading their things. We hooked up to the two double tankers and were ready to leave around 2pm. We’d stopped long enough to eat the sandwiches Mom had prepared and

brought in the cooler. With one final look, Mom led the way with Josh and his family following in their Megacab and the two tankers followed by the lowboy. It was about 5 when we got home and Jan and her Mom had dinner waiting. After dinner, we showed them all three mobile homes and they liked the floor plan of the one in the middle the best. They didn't have to do anything except build a fire in the stove, turn down the furnace and crawl into bed, we'd even gotten bedding and the beds were made up.

They spent the next day unpacking and the following unloading the equipment and putting it into the pole shed we erected on each farm as a machine shed. For the moment, Josh said they'd keep the chicken coop in the machine shed. He sold me the guns I wanted for gold and turned around and gave Dad the gold for a bred cow and a bred sow. They were still dickering on the horses, but I think they were close to a deal for three bred mares. They'd have riding horses when their boys were old enough.

Marion was pregnant with their fourth child and hoping for a girl. I explained that we were younger and Jan was pregnant with our third and hoping for a boy. Dad said to be careful what you wished for, God had a sense of humor. We later found out what he'd meant, Marion had a boy and Jan had Cynthia Anne.

The two grandmothers did most of the work in the gardens that summer since neither Marion nor Jan were up to much, especially lifting. On a side note, we filled the ice houses each winter as a backup and because a block of ice in the barn soothed the livestock on especially hot, humid days. We had good harvests in the gardens and fields. Since Josh and Marion didn't have a basement, they stored their canned goods in the shelter. They were large enough to store a full years' worth of produce and still shelter from a storm.

After the harvest was finished, same oh same oh, we returned to Bryan, Ohio and picked up two modular barn kits, one of their other lines. We needed three, but not right away. We worked into January getting the two barns assembled, the hay and grain put up, etc. The weather hadn't been particularly bad so we decided to go up and get a third barn kit. We got there, got it loaded and started back when a blizzard blew in. We kept going at first, hoping to drive out of it. Didn't happen.

So, we ended up parked at an abandoned weigh station, waiting out the storm. At least the building had propane heat so we didn't freeze. Had a dickens of a time getting the pilot lit, and had to dig out some of our freeze dried food for something to eat. We were out of range with our radio and couldn't contact the farm. When the snow stopped, we put chains on the truck's wheels and it plowed the way for itself and the pickup.

Caught hell over that one, let me tell you. It had been just Josh and me on the trip and Mom lent a hand to Marion and Shirley lent a hand to Jan. "No harm, no foul," I thought. Didn't work that way; I got three nights on the couch for worrying her. Dad had the milk stored up and I switched from Colby to Monterey Jack, essentially the same process. Had enough Colby and wanted something different. Paul made mozzarella and ricotta, Dad made cheddar.

No snow in the Sedalia area and we had the third barn up before it was time to disk and drag. Jan got the garden in and when I wasn't in the field cultivating, I was helping her pick and can. We still got the occasional lid that wouldn't seal and generally turned that food into frozen stew. We'd put the cooked food in a plastic freezer container and reuse the jar. I supposed eventually, we'd have to give up home canning and only freeze. Shirley taught us the thumbnail test; press a thumbnail or fingernail into the rubber. If the dent stays, toss the lid, if it bounces back, use the lid.

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Dad and Paul said that as soon as it got was cold enough to do it, they were going to teach Josh and me how to butcher. We'd do it at my place because I had the meat cutting equipment in my machine shed. Dad was going to teach us to butcher hogs and Paul was going to teach us how to butcher beef. They weren't exactly the same we were told. Dad would also teach us how to brine and smoke the bacon and hams and picnics, if we chose.

It was an irreplaceable skill that we needed. All things considered, it was a good year on the farms, ample moisture, good yields and that applied equally to the gardens. There was plenty of sunshine, heat and humidity, perfect growing conditions. I won't say it was perfect, but the thumbnail test on the lids seemed to work. When we had a chance to get off the farm, some of the things we looked for were freezer bags and Kraft paper to wrap the meat.

Jan was expecting for a 4<sup>th</sup> time but Josh and Marion weren't. If the newest baby was a girl, the numbers would work out right. However, we still had two unoccupied farms. Josh and I made a trip to Fort Leonard Wood just after harvest and before butchering time. We wanted more 5.56x45mm. Passed by an operating farm, or should I say trying to operate? The tractor, a Ford, was broke down in the field. We decided to stop and inquire if there was anything we could do. Josh stood by the pickup while I went to the door.

"Yes?"

"Ma'am, my name is Don Masterson and my friend is Josh Morgan. We noticed your husband, I presume, broken down in the field and stopped to offer a hand. Would it be ok to go out there?"

"I'll call him on the CB, he'll be waiting."

"You two know anything about tractors?"

"About what your average farmer knows. Any idea what's wrong?"

"I think I broke an axle. If I could find the parts and had the time, I might be able to fix it. Otherwise, I'll have to get another tractor. I'm Brian Cummings, by the way."

"Well Brian we're from Sedalia so we don't know this part of the state well. Saw an abandoned tractor a ways back, would that do it?"

"I know the one you mean, that Massey Ferguson?"

"Yes, it was a Massey Ferguson."

"It's diesel, mine is gas."

"We have two drums of diesel in the back of the pickup and much more where that came from."

"This land is about farmed out. I can't get pesticides, herbicides or fertilizer. Don't have the equipment or livestock to do it the old fashioned way."

"We do. We have two 160 acre farms that we're trying to find farmers for. We're only interested in family men, about our age."

"Might be worth considering, once I get this crop in."

"How about we give you the two drums of diesel, drive you back to get that tractor and fill its tank from our Blitz cans?"

"Man that would be great."

"Let you wife know you're leaving and take a portable CB if you have one so you can keep in touch."

While Brian went into the house to fill his wife in, Josh and I unloaded the 2 55-gallon drums of stabilized diesel by rolling them off the bed and then standing them up, not an easy task. Brian returned, wearing a pistol, rifle in one hand and CB in the other and off we went. We filled the tank on the diesel tractor and added a bit of PRI-D to the existing fuel. We had to jump the battery and crank for a while, but it finally started.

Brian got down and I gave him the information I'd given Josh about location, radio frequency, etc. He said he'd talk it over with Evelyn, his wife I presumed. Josh and I continued on to Fort Leonard Wood, picked up 30 cases of ammo and headed home. We were there that night at 7, but Brian didn't call. He did call the next day and said they'd like to look the place over before they made a decision. They had a vehicle but no good gasoline.

Their farm was on US 54 just east of the junction of US 65. We got six cans of gas and went down the next day, with Jan and Marion along. Brian and Evelyn had 2 kids with a

third on the way. They'd had kids late because they'd met late. He had a degree in animal husbandry from ISU; she had a degree in English from Kansas and had taught until the pandemic. We didn't get the full story, but there was time enough for that. Their oldest was a boy, the youngest a girl. They didn't have a lot of farm equipment and the newest was the Massey we'd recovered.

## Pandemic – Chapter 13

We got them fueled up and they followed us back to the farms. After introductions were made all around, the women had a gabfest while Dad, Paul, Josh and I showed Brian the two farms. Since they were essentially identical, he picked the one that had the mobile home he liked best. We went back to our house and he took Evelyn to look at the two houses. She agreed with his choice and they came back to talk about making the move. About the only appliance they had that they wanted to move was their chest freezer which hadn't run in several years.

They'd move some family heirlooms, clothing, food supply, implements and the grain and hay from this season's crops. We set it up for the following Monday. We used the same plan as we had with Josh and Marion, omitting the extra tractors to pull tankers. We took, instead, a divided grain trailer, a section for corn and a section for hay.

The move was accomplished with practiced ease and they were in their new home by 4pm. The old freezer wouldn't run and it was set aside to haul to the landfill. The mobile homes all had 21ft<sup>3</sup> upright freezers anyway. We'd thought it all out, as best we could. We were down to one empty farm and the weather was cooling so it was time to butcher.

Three beeves and five hogs were butchered, aged, cut and wrapped. The bacon and hams brined and cured. Because Brian and Evelyn's freezer was empty, they got a bit more beef than the rest of us and we each got a hog. Thanksgiving was on us in no time and this year it was baked hens. Since Jan and my house was the largest of the original three, it wasn't a surprise that we hosted most of the celebrations. Mom and Shirley made the salads and pies. Unsure of how many hens to bake, Jan settled on six. There weren't many leftovers.

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"No more children, Don. It seems like I've either been pregnant or nursing since forever."

"I'll settle for whatever we get. I don't have to have a son, but with 4 daughters, it'll be 5 to 1."

"Marion and I were visiting and their boys are all a few months older than our girls. So, if we do happen to have another girl, they won't have to worry about mates."

"Don't forget Brian and Evelyn have one of each and she's expecting."

"That came up before they moved here."

"If we find one more couple, it could change the mix somewhat."

“Just as long as we don’t end up with polygamy. After our parents are gone, there will be room for two more families.”

“Our kids are going to need places of their own. Our parents aren’t that old.”

One of the things discussed and resolved was the edible bean situation. Twenty acres produces a lot of beans. The solution was for each of us to grow a different variety, large white, small white, kidney and pink. Brian would grow the pinto beans. Beans were a nitrogen fixing crop, legumes. As we rotated through the fields, the corn followed the beans. We didn’t use the so called ‘three sisters’ method of planting a vine bean next to a corn stalk with squash interspersed. It might work for a garden, but would be a royal pain in the field.

After Thanksgiving, we started the firewood harvest. We only had a few trees to work on our side of the road. Josh more and Brian a lot. With additional chainsaws and more pickups, it was a simple matter to trim the logs, cut them to length and split them. They were then distributed, first to Brian, then Josh and finally to the three of us. We brought them each two loads of coal and one for each of us. Next, we pulled 2 empty double tankers to Montrose and refilled them after adding the PRI-D.

Everyone had, by now, acquired a Megacab diesel pickup, usually with a topper. When we finished getting the diesel, we took the propane tanker and looked for propane tanks to empty. With our bean crops, we were able to affect trades for things we didn’t produce, like rice, sugar and salt. We took a 53’ box trailer to New Orleans for a truckload of coffee. We ended up with two truckloads, the loaded one at the loading dock plus our own. Had to drain the tanks on that diesel tractor and drain the fuel lines, a lot of work, but worth it in the end. Once again, it was PRI-D and jumper cables to the rescue.

“Is that all coffee?”

“Yes, I doubt we’ll run out.”

“Did you get the other things?”

“No, we have to go back for the sugar, salt, rice and Tabasco sauce.”

“A little of that goes a long ways.”

“Tabasco?”

“Yes. Hot sauce is hot sauce.”

“True, but it isn’t Tabasco.”

We actually killed two birds with one stone. Tabasco sauce is made on Avery Island and it’s the 5<sup>th</sup> largest salt mine in the US. The shelf life of Tabasco sauce was only 5 years,

but it still had a bite. The original has the longest shelf life. Sugar came from a sugar processing plant and the rice from an elevator and was unprocessed. The seeds of the rice plant are first milled using a rice huller to remove the chaff. At this point in the process, the product is called brown rice. The milling may be continued, removing the 'bran', i.e., the rest of the husk and the germ, thereby creating white rice. White rice, which keeps longer, lacks some important nutrients; in a limited diet which does not supplement the rice, brown rice helps to prevent the disease beriberi (due to a lack of Vitamin B1).

Most of south central Louisiana seemed to be cane sugar plantations. We tracked down a company who produced finished sugar and got about ½ semi load of 50 pound bags. We only had about ½ semi load of salt and a few cases of Tabasco. We probably could have gotten by with ⅓ sugar and ⅔ salt, but we got what we got. Canning fruit used sugar while other processes like brining pork used salt.

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When Jan had our fourth, we had to scramble to come up with another girl's name. We decided on Karen Rose. We had a complete set of stair steps, averaging about 15½ months apart. This, if you're counting, means that Cheryl was almost 4. Two months shy to be exact. Susan was a lot more trouble than Cheryl, she was into everything. I guess they call them the terrible twos for a reason. And, she was, 'Daddy's Little Girl'.

We didn't find a third farm couple for over a year. In fact, it was shortly before spring planting that our third couple made themselves known. They were driving an old club cab Ford pickup with about everything they owned in the back.

"Is this the place that's looking for a farm couple?"

"Who might you be?"

"My name's David Gershman. Wife is Lily, kids are David Jr. and Ruth."

"Know anything about farming David?"

"Not a whole lot, no. I'm a quick study."

"Just curious, what kind of name is Gershman?"

"My parents emigrated from Russia. They changed it when they got here."

"How about I arrange for you to meet everyone after dinner? You will stay for dinner, won't you?"

"I hope it's not a problem, we're Jewish."



“Keep kosher?”

“Haven’t for a long time, not since the pandemic.”

“Doesn’t matter, I think Jan has a beef roast in the oven. It’s only been about one month since she had our fourth, a girl we named Karen Rose. The others are Cheryl Lynn, Susan Marie and Cynthia Anne.”

“Introduce me and I’ll lend a hand,” Lily said.

“Jan, I’d like to introduce David, Lily, David, Jr. and Ruth. Folks, my wife Janice.”

“Something smells good. Can I help?”

I was guessing Jr. at 12, Ruth a year younger. I was wrong, not for the first time. Fraternal twins, age 11. Lily was third generation; her grandparents came over in the midst of October Revolution. David never said where he was born, I assumed the United States. One thing about that pandemic, it didn’t care about your ethnicity, religion, whether you were gay or a gay basher, you got it, you most likely died unless you had Relenza or isolated totally. Like I said, the US got hit the worst.

We got Dad and Mom, Paul and Shirley, Josh and Marion and Brian and Evelyn over after dinner to meet the Gershman’s. With skill Paul and Dad elicited what David knew about farming. He actually did know a little from staying on a farm two summers in a row. Never milked a cow before, had ridden horses, never used a team, pulled a wagon of grain from the field to the grain elevator in the crib, had seen plowing, disking and dragging but had never done it. Last job, the US military, Sergeant, separated just before the pandemic and he and his family had the flu shots and Relenza.

His job in the Army, Designated Marksman, not quite a sniper; he used his separation pay to buy a Springfield Armory M21 and GI .45. He didn’t have a lot of ammo, but preferred M118LR. His scope was a Carl Zeiss Victory Diavari 6-24x72 T tuned to M118LR. They didn’t have a shotgun or any cowboy guns. Can’t fault his taste in scopes, I had the same one. David asked if I’d tried the original BDC settings with the M118LR and I admitted I hadn’t. He said, if they stayed around, he’d check it out for me.

I mostly stayed out of the discussion that followed and showed David and family the available home. I told them regardless of what the others decided, they were welcome to spend the night. I left them to their own devices and returned home. The decision had been made and they would be offered the third place. The thing that apparently swung the discussion was his openness and honesty. Lily pitched right in and helped Jan with supper, but I learned that wasn’t unusual. Apparently they didn’t plan on having any more children. However, here I go talking about the Gershman’s and I haven’t fully introduced Brian and Evelyn Cummings.

They had equipment, as I said. They didn't have any livestock so they were given a bred sow and cow plus a mare with foal. Brian said he didn't know anything about draft horses except when they sometimes saw them in July 4<sup>th</sup> parades. While he doubted that there were many horses available anywhere around, he'd look because they could ride. He also said that he assumed if he found horses, he'd find saddles.

Interesting side question, would you expect to find horses this many years after the pandemic? It's possible, but unlikely. We consider the horse to be a domesticated animal. So did the Spanish, but some of their got away and became feral. We call them the American Mustang. According to Dad, there was a population of 33,000 wild Mustangs with another 30,000 being held by the BLM awaiting disposition of a bill that passed the house but not the senate.

Most of the Mustangs could be found in Nevada, Montana, Wyoming and Oregon. The first Mustangs descended from Iberian horses brought to Mexico and Florida. Most of these horses were of Andalusian, Arabian and Barb ancestry. Some of these horses escaped or were stolen by Native Americans, and rapidly spread throughout western North America. If you can catch one and train it, you have some fine stock. Maybe some of our domesticated horses got loose and went feral...should be able to get saddles wherever they use a lot of horses like Kentucky or Texas

David asked Brian if he minded his joining him on a horse hunt as soon as he hauled coal from Sedalia. Brian helped him haul the coal and the rest of us shared a portion of our food. Somewhere during that, they got to talking about firearms and how convenient cowboy guns were on horseback. They must have also discussed more than just cowboy guns; when they came back the first time, they had 4 horses in the trailer, 8 saddle rigs and extra rifle scabbards plus some really fancy western gun belts from some place they said in Laredo (Kirkpatrick). I saw one I liked, cross draw rig. It was set up for Vaqueros 7½" barrel on the right hand holster and a 4⅝" barrel on the crossdraw holster. My Vaquero had a 5½" barrel.

No problem, David said, he'd picked up some Colts and Vaqueros in the correct barrel lengths and would trade me the two I needed for that Colt. I traded, but I think he got the better of me. He picked up some other firearms for his family but didn't go into it. Glad I only marked the leather and didn't cut it, got plenty of scabbards. They said they were going back for 4 more horses and it wouldn't be all the way to Laredo. They weren't Mustangs, either, they were broke to ride and harness. Actually made two more trips before the weather got bad.

Dad and Paul said to break David in the hard way. You can guess, right? Mucking out stalls; you can count every crappy detail on a farm in there. He learned to drive the tractor by spreading manure. More horses, more manure. Early spring before planting, we found him a diesel tractor, plow, tandem disk, drag and a couple of wagons. Put on new tires changed the fuel and they were ready to go. We sort of took turns teaching David and even Brian got in the act. We didn't need to teach Lily, a Brooklyn native, anything about gardening. Noticed she was carrying a Browning and the kids had CZs.

## Pandemic – Chapter 14

I asked and learned from Brian that David really scored when it came to firearms. He got Lily the Browning, the kids the CZs, a SCAR 17S(H) for Lily and SCAR 16S(L)s for the kids. The designation letter S referred to semi auto versions intended for law enforcement. David and Lily had 1895s and the kids 1894s in .45 Colt. Their revolvers, after the trade, were all 5½” barrels and David took the Colt.

The gardens were in and being worked in turn by pairs of the wives. We were steadily cultivating to keep down the weeds and I was making the last pass through the corn for the season when the radio squawked. It was Dad, and I couldn't make out what he said. It was a well establish practice, by now, to respond to any radio call. It could be the bad guys; it could be an accident or even an illness. I grabbed my rifle and ran to the pickup and headed to Dad's followed closely by the others.

No bad guys this time. Dad was on the tractor holding his left arm, beads of sweat breaking out on his face. He said one word, “Heart,” and passed out. Keep in mind, there is no medical care. Either you have what you need, or... We had a Cardiac Science Powerheart AED G3 Auto Defibrillator Kit and a Respirationics Millennium M10 Concentrator with masks and cannulas. And aspirin. We got him to the house and following the directions on the defibrillator zapped him back to normal sinus rhythm or close. We put on an oxygen mask and set the rate to 6 liters 'cause that's what Mom said to do.

She dug out a bottle of tiny pills and stuck one under his tongue. Nitro? The equipment had come from a medical supply place, after the pandemic died down, according to Mom. The nitro and a few other meds were liberated from an abandoned pharmacy. She had a wrist cuff and checked his blood pressure and pulse. They were drugs the doctor recommended they keep on hand and wrote prescriptions which Dad never let her fill until the meds and equipment were free.

When he started to get up, she said one word, “Bart.” But it was more the tone and the word and he lay back down. While she was at it, Mom took Paul's blood pressure and gave him a bottle some kind of generic blood pressure med. She told him to take one aspirin a day while he was at it. Mom had been an LPN, not RN, at one time and was the closest we had to a medical professional. Lord knows, she'd sewn me up enough times. I went to the field and climbed on Dad's tractor, finishing the task he was engaged in. After supper that night, I worked my field finishing cultivating the corn. It was late when I finished. I tried not to wake Jan after I showered and crawled into bed, but she was half awake, waiting for me.

“You Mom called on the radio. She said to tell you your Dad was resting comfortably but he wouldn't be any help for weeks or months. She also said that Paul needs to work a little less and expect the four younger families to take over the farming. That's why you got the additional families wasn't it? Oh, Lily took him some chicken soup, her mother's recipe.”

“That’s part of it; the rest was security. I know that the attacks against the farms have been few and far between but that doesn’t mean they won’t happen. If it were just the two of us and the girls, we’d be up the creek without a paddle. Have to try that chicken soup, probably her wonder cure for everything.”

“And this new guy, David, is a military sharpshooter, right?”

“Right. His rifle is basically the same as mine with an adjustable stock and same optics. He suggested that that BDC may be set up for the M118LR ammo we now have in abundance. Mentioned a maximum range of 1,350 yards or over 1,200 meters. Said he’d check out my rifle for me.”

“Speaking of David, that’s a nice holster rig they brought back from Laredo.”

“There has to be something to that story. He only brought back one 7½” and one 4⅝” barrel Vaqueros. But they’re sure nice holsters.”

“Get some sleep, it’s late. I set the alarm for 5.”

Both Cheryl and Susan were potty trained by now, leaving us with Cindy and Karen still in diapers. If they all grew up to be as pretty as their mother, I’d have to sleep on the front porch with my shotgun in my lap. Despite the amount of work it involved, their hair was allowed to grow to its natural length and Jan spent time each night brushing it. They had her hair, ginger, and very fair skin. Jan made sure they wore wide brimmed hats when they were outside to avoid sunburn. They wore wide brimmed hats, jeans, cowboy boots and long sleeved western style shirts, a cute and practical outfit. Straw hats in the summer, felt in the winter.

Jan explained that people with ginger hair were classified as redheads and redheads were usually fair skinned, sometimes with freckles, and had to be careful to avoid sunburn. She wore a frumpy straw gardening hat most of the time and a Resistol when we rode. Which, these days, wasn’t as often as I’d like. We’d managed to grow a horse for each of the girls and I’d trained them after the manner of a horse whisperer. They were very gentle. Dad said Dan M. “Buck” Brannaman was the trainer who was behind the Robert Redford role in *The Horse Whisperer*. Never saw the movie.

This was a long and difficult summer with Dad laid up and Paul being set on by both Shirley and Mom. It just meant longer days for the four of us and Lily was generous with her help with Mom’s and Shirley’s gardens. Their twins were the right age to be a large part of that help. An increasing amount of the garden crops were being frozen, enough so that we went shopping for additional freezers, getting 6 more of the 21ft<sup>3</sup>.

Other than the Friday night to Saturday night Shabbat (Jewish Sabbath) the Gershtman’s observed and the Sunday’s we observed, it was six days per week of hard work. Paul generally held a Sunday service once a month and for farmers there are no true

days of rest because of the livestock. David milked his cow and tended his livestock just as the remainder of us did.

They had lived in Brooklyn at the time of the initial outbreak of the pandemic and headed to a cabin in the Catskills immediately. They had a few preps and David had been able to supply game to keep them in meat. After a few months of isolation, they began wondering. He had a gallon jug of PRI-G and picked up gasoline from the occasional farm tank. They avoided cities at all costs except to check out grocery warehouses in the wee hours.

They were near wits end when they rolled into Jefferson City where they heard about our operation and us looking for farmers. They got general directions and headed our way, looking for several days before they found us. David was willing to give anything a try and took to farming fairly well, all things considered. That fall, we learned what the chink in his armor was, chainsaws. He was deathly afraid of chainsaws and refused to pick one up. Someone had to run the splitter and stack the wood so he split and his two kids stacked or loaded the split firewood. We used some, not all, of the safety equipment available. The only accident we'd had was when I'd been cutting a tree by myself and the safety equipment wouldn't have helped.

Jan and I had wood burning kitchen stoves, one inside for cooking and one outside for canning. Thus, we used the most firewood. I kept the front porch pretty much stacked full as well as the back porch with a third pile near the outside wood stove. We always made sure we had plenty of coal going into winter. Once a year, we'd top off the fuel tanks and go to Montrose for diesel and around looking for propane beside the one source I kept in reserve. Montrose was getting low by now and it would be truck stops in a year or two. Paul had doped the diesel fuel in the loaders at Montrose so when we needed to reload the train, the fuel would be good.

Dad, Paul and I had the wood burning kitchen stoves, one inside and one outside for canning. The three families on the other side of the road had propane only, as backup for heat and for hot water, kitchen stove and clothes dryer. It was line dry in the summer to preserve propane. Not an easy life, but it beat the hell out of second choice, being dead.

We got two turkeys this fall, I got one in the pasture and Brian got another in his pasture. We had more than enough for Thanksgiving. One wasn't enough and two was a little too much leaving us with the usual leftovers. The cooking duties were swapped some and our newer members added new dishes and variations on some of the old. It was home grown cranberries, courtesy of David and Lily. They had some vines that they started in sand beds and kept watered. The fruit was handpicked in late September.

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Maybe this would be a good time to talk about ham radio. We'd picked up a top of the line radio, tower, standoffs, coaxial cable and the whole nine yards, before we got generators. Before that, we had a pair of deep cycle 12v batteries recharged by a PV panel. A complete setup, but not much power and it was used to power the CB radio at the house. The radio was a Yaesu FTDX-9000D, 200 watt transceiver. We had a whole set of beam antennas, several verticals, and no power.

That changed when we got the generators, but there was little time to mess with the radios, figuring out all of the ins and outs about how to use them. Dad's heart attack changed that. The way he put it at the meeting he called at their house was, "After my heart attack, Mary was very strict. I had to take my walk every day, weather permitting, and then take it easy the rest of the day. Anyhow, I finally had time to figure out that radio and had the power to use it."

"What's this all about, Dad?"

"Hold your horses, I'll get to that. Anyway, as I was saying, I figured the radio out. I pointed the antenna generally northeast to see who I could pick up. Heard someone in Europe, I thought, speaking in German. I said plain out, 'Anyone speak English?' and the guy replied in English. Turns out he lives in the Rhineland Pfalz section of Germany, wherever that is. Said there was an Air Base there, Spangdahlem. And some of the US personnel survived; mostly support types, security, cooks, etc. His description, not mine. Point is we're not the only ones who survived. Even have some Americans alive in Europe."

"And then what?"

"That's where it gets really strange. Right in the middle of a sentence, he switches to code and shuts down."

"What do you mean by code?"

"His exact expression was TTYL."

"That's 'talk to you later'" David said.

"Anyway he shut down right quick."

"Strange. Did you hear anyone else on the radio?"

"No. Should I have heard someone?"

"It's probably nothing. I heard mention of a program shortly after I separated. It would involve Northcom and had to do with the military response to the Pandemic."

"They were supposed to be lending medical aid, weren't they?" Dad recalled.

“That was the part they made public, yes.”

“Well, what didn’t they make public? Couldn’t be law enforcement, it would violate Posse Comitatus.”

“Not directly law enforcement. More like ensuring that the remaining resources were made available to the survivors. By force of arms, if necessary.”

“Jack booted thugs? Not in my America!”

“David, are you sure about what you heard?”

“Pretty much. That’s one of the reasons we kept on the move.”

“Have you seen any evidence of it actually happening?”

“What’s that saying? Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you. No, we’ve never seen any direct evidence.”

“Well, what indirect evidence, have you seen?”

“Communities we heard were thriving being abandoned and stripped bare, type of things, you mean? We saw two small towns that either had sufficient stocks of the anti-viral or isolated. When we heard about them, we headed there but by the time we arrived, they were stripped bare ghost towns. About the only evidence there had been people there was the garbage, it wasn’t that old. That’s why when we heard about you we had our fingers crossed you’d still be here. Then when the chance came to improve our lot by getting some firearms and help defend this place, I made it a high order of business.”

“Did it involve all of Northcom?”

“Not according to what I heard. It was a special unit not unlike Delta Force, all specialists, not some of America’s finest like Detachment D was. I heard the word cutthroats mentioned.”

“That reminds me in a way of a movie, with Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas.”

“I know that movie,” Paul said, “*Seven Days in May*. Let’s hope that if this unit really exists, it meets the same end as General Scott.”

## Pandemic – Chapter 15

“Are you equipped to take on that kind of unit?”

“That depends on how large it is, how it’s equipped and how what we have compares.”

“What do you have?”

“Rockets: Javelin, AT4s and LAWs. Barrett M82A1M with A-MAX, M33 and Mk211MP, Some of the Barrett single shots in .416, Ma Deuces, M240s, assorted hand grenades.”

“What, no land minds?”

“Too many kids.”

“Why not Claymores?”

“Didn’t occur to us, we’re civilians.”

“Can you use what you have?”

“We took enough so we could practice. We have six machine guns 3 heavy, 3 medium. Lots of barrels and ammo. Have the tools to headspace extra M240B barrels too.”

“Vests? LBE?”

“Interceptor and MOLLE. Since we have your two kids to baby sit, we can field up to 12 defenders.”

“That’s if they show up.”

“You brought them up David, we didn’t. It occurs to me that Dad said he told that guy in Germany where we were located. You found us, why can’t they?”

“Back to the mines. Do you have a ready source for Claymores?”

“If they have them at Fort Leonard Wood.”

“How long would that take?”

“Less than a full day down and back with time to shop.”

“That should be enough time; we can’t be sure where they’d be coming from. Plus if I understood what Bart told that guy in Germany, he only said the Sedalia, Missouri area.”



David went along with Josh and me. We found the Claymore sets, C4 and several extra lengths of det cord plus initiators, sort of a blasting cap with a 10 second delay to light the blasting cap and det cord. The actual initiator resembled the fuses used on training grenades with a wire to hold the cap in place. A firm tug on the cap would start the fuse and the blasting cap exploded about 10 seconds later creating a near instantaneous explosion since det cord burns at 28,000ft/min. Refer to the time blasting fuse igniter M3A1 for the M116A1 simulator in FM 3-23.30.

The distance between the two most separate drive ways was right at 2,000 meters, approximately 2,187 yards or 1¼ mile. Basing the M82s on the two center farms made the most sense and that was Josh and me. Rockets would be on either end and the wives would operate the machine guns from fixed emplacements. We did a couple of trial runs to eliminate any bugs in our plans. After, we all practiced with our rifles, shotguns and handguns. The Claymores were placed in such a way that the blast wouldn't pepper anyone's home with the steel balls.

They didn't show up until late March, with the blonde riding in one of the Hummers. Since the Claymore has two detonator wells, the first was used as an individual trigger and the second as one of three triggers fired in a bank. We allowed them to enter the trap and the machine guns closed their back door. I was standing in the road with my cowboy guns and when the hummer stopped, I asked what they wanted.

"Heard you had a good harvest," the Lieutenant said.

"Maybe, Maybe not. What business is it of yours?"

"We're from Northcom and charged with the equitable distribution of foodstuffs."

"We mostly grow livestock feed and plant small gardens. Just enough to get by."

"Under the authority vested in me by the Commander in Chief, US Armed Forces, we are taking that food for redistribution."

"Excuse me? I don't think so."

"Look farmer boy, I have two full squads of highly trained soldiers, we can do it the easy way or the hard way."

"Let me check with the wife."

I walked over to Jan who was racking a round into the M240B.

"She said no, be on your way."

We all had CBs on channel 33.

The Lieutenant and a Sergeant dismounted weapons in hand. The cracks from two heavy rifles sounded and they fell mortally wounded. The Hummers attempted to retreat, into a hail of heavy machine guns and rockets. It was over in a matter of seconds, good guys 1, Army zero. Well, almost, anyway.

I awoke in bed, my mouth dry and my bladder full. Well, not exactly, I had a Foley (Urinary catheter) and it was uncomfortable. I was alone in my bedroom with a bell on the table. I shook it hoping to get attention.

“You rang? We were hoping you’d wake up soon.”

“Water?”

“I’ll get you a fresh pitcher.”

“How long?”

“Seven weeks.”

“Seven weeks? What happened?”

“One of the dead guys was playing possum. He got you in the head and caused an Epidural Hematoma. Your Mom had to cut a hole in your skull to relieve the pressure. She got to it just in time. You had a few moments of lucidity before you passed out. Your Mother will be glad to see you awake; she’d been beside herself since it happened.”

“Everyone else ok?”

“Two minor wounds. We parked their equipment out in the timber and secured the weapons and ammo in three of the gun safes.”

“Who else was hurt?”

“Josh and Brian. Creases, nothing too serious.”

“When can I get up?”

“After you Mom checks you over and pulls the catheter. Want some soup? Lily made it and said it was good for what ailed you?”

“Chicken, huh?”

“No, vegetable beef.”

Just when you figured that you had the stereotype figured out, they slip you a bowl of vegetable beef soup; I’d have eaten her chicken soup, it was good. David appeared to

be a good guy and a wealth of information because of his close ties with some guys he knew in Northcom. He'd been right on the money and his marksmanship that day seven weeks before made the difference.

I got brought up to speed on how many were killed, all of them, where the equipment was, weapons in gun safes and vehicles in my woods, etc. David had taken out six, Josh and I four each including the one that needed killing twice, and so forth. The bodies were buried in an unidentified field turning into fertilizer. There had been no follow up mission for reasons unknown.

One soldier didn't die quickly and became their sole source of information. He claimed they'd intercept Dad's radio conversation with the German and had headed here immediately. Took a while to find the place and when they did...I knew the rest of the story. Dad and Paul had done the questioning and they were very angry when they did it. The soldier succumbed to the interrogation techniques. Some of the Claymores were responsible for some of the kills and had since been replaced. We'd have to take extra precautions to ensure the kids didn't get near them.

Mom removed the Foley and said I was ok for limited duty. The flap of skin she'd opened to drain the blood had been sewn back up and the stitches removed. Other than being tender, there was no visible injury. The type of injury I had was the same that had killed Liam Neeson's wife, Natasha Richardson. I didn't know who either of them was.

The eighth week was spent taking it easy, getting muscle tone back. I'd lost a little weight and my jeans were more comfortable. The Laredoan gun belt fit, one notch tighter. However, I mostly stuck with my Kimber in the tanker holster. Our land was plowed, disked, dragged and planted and the garden was in. For the first time in a long time, Jan was neither pregnant nor nursing. It would be a week or two before I would be interested in bedroom antics.

David had taken my Super Match and pulled the label Dad had added and indeed, the BDC was specific to M118LR, but off for M118. He divided the M118LR between the two of us replacing what he'd taken from others with M80 ball. He also located and added a leather cheek rest that put my eye in line with the scope after minor adjustments.

I was able to handle the cultivating and help a little in the garden. Josh did my milking and cared for the livestock. By now, Dad had a regular conversation going with the guy in Germany, Aaron. The National Socialist German Worker's (Nazi) Party had experienced a re-growth in Germany after the Pandemic. The first call had ended abruptly when they'd come calling. However, this wasn't the 1930s and they weren't represented in any great numbers. Some Germans were openly resisting their efforts to take over the country again and they didn't have a charismatic leader like Adolph Hitler.

Dad had also learned that the special group within Northcom was much larger than expected. We had been visited by two squads, the minimum sized unit sent on a 'raid'.

More often, it was a full Platoon or full Company and few could stand against a force that size. They were indeed collecting the food and redistributing it, but kept a fair share for themselves, for the good of the country.

We had no Congress, Supreme Court or Executive branch. The government, such as it was, was under the command of the remaining Joint Chiefs. Which group, Dad explained, got Rellenza when it became apparent that the vaccine didn't work. It was, Dad claimed, like the situation that existed after the Revolutionary War before the Constitution was adopted. However, the Joint Chiefs were honoring their oaths to protect and defend the Constitution as best they could.

Since I'd been pulled from school in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I didn't know that much history, except what Mom taught. She'd covered the Revolution and the Civil War and other wars to a lesser extent. While she called me a whiz at history, I wasn't so sure. Regardless, that encounter with trained soldiers, was an eye opener and nearly an eye closer.

We got through another growing season somehow and had replaced the coal, diesel and propane. The logs were cut and stacked, waiting for David and his kids to cut and stack/distribute. It had been another good year for crops, both in the fields and gardens although we'd finished off the canning lids and had to freeze everything.

Dad picked up someone discussing Jarden Brands, the company who made the Ball and Kerr canning jars and lids. They had first resumed the lid manufacturing and just this year were producing jars. They were being distributed by the Army. While it made sense for the Army to aid in restoring that business as a high priority, based on our experience, we weren't sure we wanted to contact them.

Dad contacted a ham he now knew in Jefferson City and the Army had dropped of a huge supply for the government of Missouri to distribute. They weren't free. We made a trip to Jefferson City. Typically a jar is good for 10 uses, thus we'd lost jars over the years. Lids are one time use and we were out. We took some junk silver and a little gold and came home with a semi load, a full one time replacement of the jars and 5 years' worth of lids.

The government had reduced the price of gold from \$1,500 to \$560 and silver from \$30 to \$27 and it was the official price and we were back on the gold and silver standard. In 1934 or thereabouts, the US government established the price of gold at \$35 per troy ounce and a silver certificate for one Morgan silver dollar was redeemable for a 90% silver dollar which actually contained 0.77344 troy ounces of silver. Now the math comes in. Since 0.77344 ounces of silver was equal to one dollar and one ounce of gold was equal to \$35, 0.02857 ounces of gold equaled 0.77344 ounces of silver and the value ratio was ~27 to 1. Some rounding was involved to get the values to even dollar figures, silver would have been 27.07. The government, i.e. the Pentagon, had taken inflation into effect, comparing that \$35 in 1934 money to the latest year available, 2008.

## Pandemic – Chapter 16

It mattered little what value we put on our coins, this was the official ratio and prices. It only bothered those few who had paid more. Even Dad and Paul came out well in the end. I hadn't bought any of mine and eventually turned in the coins for the newly minted one-tenth, one-quarter, one-half and one ounce silver coins which were .999 fine silver. The gold Eagles just took on a different, permanent value. There was no 'spot price' for gold and silver.

David sometimes joined my Dad listening to the radio and when he could, identified the language involved. He had been in many countries and had heard the local languages even if he didn't speak them. From what they presumed was the Middle East, they picked up Hebrew, which David did speak, Arabic and Farsi. Another time it was Afghanistan or Pakistan, he was sure. There were multiple conversations in Spanish and Portuguese. Some he could recognize to the general southeast (Africa?).

English, of course, all three brands, American, Australian and English. Any direction Dad pointed the beam; there were conversations on the amateur bands. Scandinavian, assorted Slavic, Russian, Chinese, Korean and all sorts of languages they couldn't identify. The point was we weren't the only living souls on the planet. Plus there was a reasonably sized settlement in Jefferson City. Coal was still disappearing from the rail cars so we presumed the people on the other side of Sedalia were surviving. Nonetheless, we avoid contact with the military at all costs, until they came looking.

Only three vehicles this time, Hummers but no one manning the machineguns. It was a Major and a CSM with a small guard detail.

"Folks in Jefferson City gave us general directions and we came to check on you. I'm Major Collins, of the 82<sup>nd</sup>."

"Airborne?"

"Yes. We've been looking for a rogue group of about 24 individuals. It was suggested that we ask you about them."

"What do you mean by rogue group Major?"

"Just that, two squads who split off from Northcom to do their own thing. They'd approach small communities, seize their food and bury the bodies. Didn't leave witnesses. Lost track of them some time back. Heard they were in this area and just up and disappeared. There's a reward being offered."

"Big reward?"

"Not really, 100 ounces of gold."

“No questions asked?”

“Nope, just have to see the bodies. Why, you know something?”

“I might. I don’t know exactly where the bodies are buried but they came here and we managed to take them out. We had them outnumbered in terms of firepower.”

“Been to some Armories, huh?”

“I’m not sure I want to answer that question. Hang on. Dad, got your ears on?”

“What do you need Don?”

“Can you drive over, right now?”

“Is it important?”

“Very.”

“Give me five.”

“Major, I can show you where their vehicles are, they’re back there in my woods.”

“Sergeant, check it out.”

“Sir.”

“They won’t run Major. Between the Claymores, rockets and .50 caliber fire, they’re junk.”

“Who had the military experience?”

“One man, David. He was a designated Marksman. We got the rest on our own and read field manuals.”

“You figured it all out from field manuals?”

“Mostly. How do you teach soldiers?”

“Field manuals plus hands on instruction.”

“David knew an Engineer.”

“What do you need Don?”

“Can you show the Major where the bodies are buried? The reward is 100 ounces of gold, \$56,000!”

“Is this on the up and up?”

“Yes sir. Rogue group we lost track of. People in Jefferson City said to ask you. Your son already told us where the vehicles are. We have to confirm identities and if they check, you get the 100 ounces.”

“When in ten years?”

“A little sooner than that.”

“What the hell, they in your corn field Don. Come on, I’ll show you.”

Dad went to the cornfield and walked due north for a number of paces and turned east for a few more paces.

“Here. Want me to get a loader bucket and blade; they buried about 6’ deep.”

“If it wouldn’t be too much trouble, thank you.”

“You do it Don, I’ll talk to the Major.”

“Where’s the Major?”

“Out in my corn field. You can follow me back; I’m taking a tractor and loader to help remove some of the soil.”

“So just you people took them out?”

“Three of us counted for almost half of the fatalities. They started it, we didn’t. We were well prepared for any eventuality. What are you looking for?”

“Dog tags.”

“Dad, did you bury them with their dog tags or keep those?”

“I kept those why?”

“Because that’s all we need to see. Don’t need to disturb the graves.”

“Grave. Plain old common grave.”

“Show me the dog tags and we’ll do the paperwork for the reward.”

“Go back to Don’s house and I’ll bring them over.”

“There you go all 24 tags. We left one on each body per David’s instructions.”

“Let me fill out the paperwork and I’ll give you the coins.”

“Just like that?”

“Yes of course, just like that. I wouldn’t have admitted I had the coins until I’d seen the tags. I’ll list the tags, you sign the receipt for the gold and that’s it. Signing the receipt is not an admission of guilt, just acknowledge of receipt of the gold for helping to identify the bodies. Sign there after you count the coins.”

“But you haven’t filled in the numbers yet.”

“That’s why Majors have Sergeants.”

“Ok that’s ten. Make the other stacks the same height, good enough way to count?”

“Works for me.”

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“This doesn’t divide evenly, Dad. It’s  $16\frac{2}{3}$  ounce per family.”

“Make it 16 ounces per family and you take the rest; you were hurt the worst.”

“Well, 16 ounces for you and Paul and 17 apiece for the rest of us.”

“I’ll swing by Paul’s and give him his and explain.”

“And I’ll go see the other guys.”

“\$9,520 for what?”

“Those soldiers were rogue and there was a reward. Dad and Paul took 16 ounces each and we’ll each get 17 ounces,” I explained four times; once to each of the guys and once to Jan.

One of the effects of going back to a combined gold/silver standard was a revaluing of things that resembled their true worth in the overall scheme of things. With new jars and lids available, for example, they lost value. Scarce items increased in value. Things we had in surplus, especially beans, were marketed with the price slowly falling off. The first year, we made out like bandits because we had beans, rice, sugar, coffee and salt to sell, fruit of our labor and enterprise.



Somewhere along the line, the Pentagon managed to get elections set up and new politicians were elected. They were held to a much higher standard and people made it clear during the campaigning process exactly what they expected. If they didn't get it, the person would be recalled. Someone also dug out the old saw, an armed society is a polite society and the new Congress confirmed the suspension of the guns laws by repealing each and every one.

Ron Paul, Sarah Palin and T. Boone Pickens made runs for the White House. Both Dr. Ron Paul and billionaire T. Boone Pickens were too old. Palin was deemed too conservative, others too liberal. It boiled down to two moderates, one Republican and one Democrat. The Republican Party carried the election by a wide margin. Around the world, the same thing was happening as people pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and reformed new governments more in keeping with the national spirit. In Germany, the National Socialists elected no one.

With the US back on an actual gold and silver standard, the new dollars became the sought after currency. Look at history for your guide, that how it used to be. The US Armed Forces, as decimated as they were, were still the most powerful in the world but no longer the World's Policemen. The moderates in Congress and the White House saw to that.

The death toll was sort of like the remark Samuel Clemens once made, *The report of my death was an exaggeration*. But, he also said, *Reader, suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself.*

The actual death toll, worldwide was a staggering 50%. In the US, with its better level of healthcare, a full  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the population, over 200 million died. In the end, it was as I said isolation and/or Relenza, an antiviral that worked.

I was given an MRI to ensure no lasting damage to my brain and got clipped while I was at it, I didn't want a girls' basketball team. Dad died a few years later, heart attack. Paul had a fatal stroke. Mom went next followed by Shirley. We took possession of two additional 160 acre farms and our daughter's each got a farm. The others did the same to get growing room for their families. Only Josh and Marion didn't get additional land, but their four married our four so it worked out alright in the end.

When Jan and I finally retired, years later, our daughter's and their husband's farmed our land on shares and Jan and I tended the garden. Industry was rebuilding itself and the lot of the farmer had changed. There had been a steady decline in farm families since probably before WW II. That changed and there was a brief resurgence in the family farm although I doubted it would last more than one or two generations. The new chemicals and the gm seeds were now a fact of life, as were much higher yields, allowing American to once again become the world's breadbasket.

We did learn, eventually, that neither Iran nor North Korea posed a nuclear threat. India and Pakistan had somehow managed to find a livable peace and eliminated their nukes.

Israel still wouldn't say one way or the other. A three party agreement between China, Russia and the US resulted in nuclear disarmament by the big five. Although any country with SSBNs, still had them. The missiles and bombs were dismantled. Our cores were stored in the Yucca Mountain vault in Nevada.

Yucca Mountain was an on again, off again project for years. Bush Jr. funded it and Harry Reid became the leader in the Senate and it died on the vine. It was eventually resurrected and completed and the wastes hauled to the site. Because of the nuclear shutdown in the intervening years, it didn't reach capacity in 2014 as had been feared. When the issue raised its head in later years, people wrote their congress critters and the project was resumed at a rapid pace. Nobody wanted the waste in his or her backyard.

So, that's it, the story of the great Pandemic of 09-10 from one man's perspective. We avoided the actual pandemic by isolating, but we were in the aftermath up to our chins.

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